

“Some of the Basics”

Job 1:1; 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12; Mark 10: 2-16; Psalm 26 10-8-06

There have been many times in life when I have heard someone referred to as “a person of integrity.” I have always been stopped by that word as I have tried to understand just what was meant by it.

When I started to reflect on the scripture readings for this morning, I paused for a bit over the word “integrity” found in the reading from the book of Job. It seems that when we think of Job or speak of him we always tend to dwell on his patience. A careful rereading of this book might cause us to wonder a little about just how patient he actually was. But, he possessed “integrity” we are told.

It is defined by Merriam-Webster as a “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : incorruptibility

2 : an unimpaired condition : soundness

3 : the quality or state of being complete or undivided : completeness”

Wikipedia, says that integrity is “**being** one’s word....knowing what is important to you and living your actions accordingly.”

For weeks we have been moving through the little Letter of James which urges us to be “doers of the word and not hearers only.” James asked over and over again, of those who read his words, that they focus on what it is in life and in their faith that is the most important and then live out their actions accordingly. In asking people to live the teachings of Christ to their fullest in reference to other people and to God, James was issuing a call for people to have a measure of “integrity.” He was asking people to live so that they had “A personal inner sense of wholeness deriving from honesty and consistent uprightness of character.” (Wikipedia) Job must have possessed this quality for it was noted by God when the story tells us, God offered him up to Satan for a time of terrible testing.

Integrity is one of the basics of a life well lived. It is one of the essential elements of being a Christian and following in the footsteps of our Master.

Of course, this set me to thinking about those who say they will do something evil and then do it. Do they have integrity? After all, they have lived their words. I will leave you to wrestle with this question. If it means “incorruptibility” the answer must be “No.” Unless one’s system of values is corrupt to begin with. But, we are not looking at corrupt beings this morning.

Back to where we belong. Job adhered to his value system and , as we all know, came out all right in the end after suffering through a distressing ordeal not helped much by the attentions of his friends and even his wife.

A little book published some years ago, Why Bad Things Happen to Good People, written by the Rabbi Harold Kushner addresses the situation of Job and its apparent unfairness. Kushner concludes that God does not deliberately inflict evil on us, the randomness of the universe is what determines who will be stricken and who is not.

Contrary to what seems to be written in later pages of the Letter to the Hebrews, the strength of one’s faith does not make him or her immune to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that fly around us in the forms of disease, accidents, or just plain bad luck. However, the strength of one’s faith determines how we will deal with the problems and difficulties dealt to us by life. Having a strong and abiding faith can help

us face with courage and integrity anything that may befall us. If we know, we are safe in the grace and love of God, we can move forward and conquer anything, even ourselves. A strong faith is another of the basics of life. It gives us an incorruptible center. A center to which we can return when we need to decide what is morally right and what is morally wrong in life in general and in our lives in specific. Having this center gives us great peace. We know what it is we should do to be followers of the Christian way of life.

When we look at the news on a daily basis we must often wonder what has happened to those who cannot quite determine what is right or wrong. What went wrong in the life of a person who kills innocent children for some reason known only to him or her self? What went wrong in the life of a person who attempts to draw young people into a way of life that is contrary to what they know? If we can ever answer these questions we will be a long way toward lifting the veil of evil that sometimes surrounds us.

So there is integrity and there is faith and there is also innocence. The innocence of a child. The openness of a child. The willingness to see other humans as simply that, humans with no judgment issued. We are told we must be like children to enter the Kingdom of God. How do we ever square this with becoming mature Christians? What is it we need to do to become child-like—never childish but child-like? Mark poses this question for us.

I was talking to one of you the other day about children who are 3, 4 and five years old and how precious they are. Also, how insightful they may be. I hope we all have the opportunity to encounter a child who can look at a complex problem, see straight to the heart of the matter and make all things new again to our world weary eyes and souls. They seem to have a knack for this. They can give us important lessons in life. To slow it down, smell the roses, see what is all around us and accept what it is we see. There is a freshness in their observations before we adults work our magic on them as we acquaint them with life.

In our day and age it seems increasingly difficult to look at the world and all that is in it with child-like eyes. It seems that we are pressed more and more to be wary, to cease trusting, to withdraw from one another, to be fearful and to operate from a base of trying to get the other guy before he gets us. This is a long way from living the integrity of the teachings of Christ. From being and living the word.

We are blessed here in this small community to be able to step out beyond self-concern, to know and understand who our neighbors are and to step in and help them. To see without judgmental eyes. In a small community such as this, people are very good at learning who those are that see the world in a child-like manner. They know with whom they are safe and with whom they are not. They understand which people operate from a base of love and faith and acceptance. There are many here who live their word and the Word on a daily basis. There are many who have integrity, faith and child-like vision.

If, in taking a good look at ourselves, we discover that we are lacking in one of these qualities, we can always change. A song sung by Sally Gray yesterday at the funeral service of Sally Hale reminded us to “Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water, put your hand in the hand of the one who calmed the sea, Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently, Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.

Every time I look into the Holy Book I want to tremble (tremble)
When I read about the part where the Carpenter cleared the temple (temple)
For buyers and the sellers were no different 'fellers' than what I profess to be
And it causes me shame to know we're not the people we should be So

Put your hand in the hand of the Man who stilled the water
Put your hand in the hand of the Man who calmed the sea
Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently
Put your hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee.”

That is what our gospel tells us. That is always the “good news.” Jesus came to take us by the hand and to show us the transforming power of God that reaches out for all of us touching us even when we do not know it is there. God never gives up on us. Never. The blessing that our Creator is to us, we must learn to be to others through integrity, faith and the nature of a child. Amen.