

Another beautiful day in Maine!

Yesterday we were happy to welcome the Sunday School back. Jane Sandler gave the Children's Sermon and was a hit with everyone! And we were happy to welcome Judy Falconer back.

We held in prayer: Bill and Jean Turner, Gerry, Laura and all who could not be with us. Travel blessings for Viola and all those travelling to warmer climes for the winter!

LIGHTING THE PEACE AND JUSTICE CANDLE Mary Luti, Pastor at Wellesley Village Church

Luke records the words of Jesus, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you." We continue to light this candle of Peace and Justice that you all first lit 14 years ago. We were staggered by the icy calculation of the attacks, stupefied that the men who carried them out believed God was pleased with the carnage. It was harder than ever to hear the Gospel in those days: 'love your enemies. Repay no one evil for evil.'" How could we hear it, much less obey, after bad men with box-cutters ripped open our hearts?

There were some who asked, if this is not the time to summon each other to love, when is? What else should we say in a world where now not even an eye for an eye is sufficient?

And so in those awful days, obedient in faith, they spoke of the forgiveness of enemies, speak of it still, and hope to keep speaking of it to the end of their days.

But faith is faith, not common sense, not even pious common sense. In the bleak landscape between ordinary devotion and extraordinary desperation, it demands a kind of surrender and bestows a mysterious courage. By its peculiar grace alone, we grope and anguish, remember and pray, hope and wonder, obey and persist our way towards healing, a new humanity, an impossible love, a someday resurrection.

Remember in mercy, O God, all who perished on that day. And remember us who live and mourn, struggling to hear, struggling to believe, struggling to obey the awful law of love. Amen

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING Wisdom 7:26-8:1-Wisdom is often personified as a woman throughout the book of Proverbs. Here, she cries out to those who continue to ignore her, who continue to follow their own desires and the seductions of the world, rather than her insight that comes from God.

EPISTLE James 3:1-12 -declares the danger of not thinking before we speak. James is a continuation of Wisdom literature in the New Testament, and reminds us that we are known by what we say, more even than what we do. We bless and curse from the same mouth. We gossip and slander as well as praise from the same tongue. But

if we allow terrible things to come forth, is the good not tainted?

GOSPEL Mark 8:27-38-contains a story in which Peter does not think before he speaks. Peter is the first to declare the Messiah. Peter, who first praised and declared Jesus the Messiah, is now the stumbling block for the Messiah, trying to stop him from what he came to do.

For the wisdom in Your word, for Your call to faithfulness, for Your gift of promise, we give You thanks.

MESSAGE

Easy to say, harder to do...

Beth Hood

Imagine that you are a student about 3,000 years ago at some Ancient Near Eastern school of wisdom. It is believed that just such schools existed, particularly in Egypt and possibly also in Israel. The teachers in those schools were renowned sages whose speech dripped with proverbs, adages, axioms, aphorisms, maxims. The students were young men whose job it was to learn at the feet of these older and wiser teachers. If you were a student in such a school, what do you suppose the final exam would look like? No one is certain, but a number of scholars have found evidence that exams in such schools involved the teacher throwing out the first half of a proverb with the student then being required to complete the wise saying.

Probably most of you could do pretty well on such a test. I will toss out the first part of some proverbs and you respond by finishing the line out loud.

"Spare the rod...spoil the child."

"When the going gets tough...the tough get going."

"What goes up....must come down."

"A fool and his money...are soon parted."

"If you give him an inch...he'll take a mile."

"The grass is always greener...on the other side of the fence."

"With friends like that....who needs enemies."

"People who live in glass houses...should not throw stones."

Those of us who have been around in life know these sayings well. Proverbs, someone said, are easy to say but hard to forget.

"Fear of the Lord" is the theme of the book of Proverbs and is the content of Wisdom's message this morning. This is not the fear of the abused toward their abusers, but a loving reverence submitting to the Lordship of God. It is worthy of note that Wisdom 'delivers

her message in the public squares; at the street corners and at the city gates.' The call of Wisdom is not for the elite few. She does not call out in the theology classroom or limit her work to quiet halls of academia, but cries out in the midst of the noise of the streets and in the gates of cities.

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament Epistles reveals that the early church was troubled by all sorts of 'false teachers'. It was a veritable Tower of Babel in the Corinthian church made worse by teachers and preachers whose tongues were out of control. James' words of wisdom this morning caution us to restrain our tongues. James considers the tongue, the instrument of words, a tyrant that is managed by an even greater power, the human heart. The words we say reflect much of what we are inside.

A mature person, James says, is easily recognized if he can control his tongue. Because the whole body follows what the tongue says. The tongue is compared to a rudder for a ship, a small fire to a forest fire, and a bit for a horse. These small things do control their larger components. So the tongue manages one's life. James compares it to evil when he refers to all misuses of the tongue.

Echoing the teaching of Jesus, James reminds us that the tongue may be a tyrant, but it takes its power and direction from the heart. Bitter and sweet water cannot flow from the same source. Fig trees cannot bear olives, and those who praise God cannot curse their fellow men.

It's a pity Peter didn't have the Epistle of James to read. Poor magnificent, blundering Peter. Someone said the only time Peter took his foot out of his mouth was to switch feet. In this morning's reading he does it again. In a flash of insight, Peter answers Jesus, "You are the Messiah." But when Jesus explains how that will translate into everyday life, Peter reprimands Jesus. A suffering Messiah can't be right; it didn't fit any of Peter's ideas about the Messiah. Jesus, in turn, reprimands Peter.

Mark's is the shortest of the Gospels largely because he races through the teaching, preaching and healing journey of Jesus. The cross is essential to Mark's understanding of Jesus' purpose and mission as Messiah.

During a battle a soldier was frantically digging in as shells fell all around him. Suddenly his hand felt something metal and he grabbed it. It was a silver cross. Another shell exploded and he buried his head in his arms. He felt someone jump in with him and looked over and saw an Army chaplain. The soldier thrust the cross in the chaplain's face and said, "I sure am glad to see you. How do you work this thing?"

The cross is central to our faith but, like Peter, we cringe at cross-bearing. What does Jesus mean when he tells Peter and the crowds, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"? Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "To deny oneself is to be aware only Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us."

People say, "I guess that's a cross I have to bear," generally with a poor-pitiful-me tone of voice. Is that really cross-bearing? No!

Cross-bearing doesn't refer to meaningless or even involuntary suffering that has to be endured. It is reaching beyond our own suffering to others and helping them, that's taking up your cross. Bearing our cross is a choice. It is a voluntary form of sacrificial obedience that identifies us completely with Christ. Bearing our cross is not making the best of a situation or circumstance. It is something we deliberately take up and bear.

We would rather wear a cross than bear a cross. The cross is all about discipline, hard work, obedience and commitment. It isn't easy, but it is possible. It draws us closer to Christ and makes us more Christlike.

Some women who live near Washington, DC wanted to show God's love to a special group of people. They heard about a group of babies who were rarely held and destined to live and die in hospitals because they had AIDS. The babies didn't get much attention, so they began to cry silently. No one had responded to their crying out loud so they stopped doing it. But they still shed tears.

The women took the babies home. They would respond to the silent tears by holding and rocking the babies. Soon those unloved, cast-off AIDS babies began to cry out loud again. They had been spoken to in the only way they could understand. They had been spoken to in the language of love by women willing to deny themselves and take up their cross.

Take up your cross. Whether it's giving love to someone who has never known love; or finding a way to help a people who are systematically being driven from their homes and destroyed; or helping refugees looking for a better life to find that life. Find something bigger than yourself, maybe even bigger than your community.

To experience life in Christ requires feeling the weight of his cross in our daily discipleship. It's not easy, but it's not impossible. When we say yes to the cross, we don't have to bear the load alone. The burden of the cross is no burden at all- when we're yoked with Christ. Take up your cross and follow him.