

PRIORITIZING LIFE

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 & John 1:43-51

If I were to ask you “Who are you?” how would you respond? I am sure most of us would respond with our names. If questioned further we might even respond with our relationship with others. For example: I am a daughter, a wife, a mother, etc. How many of us would choose a first response of “I am a child of God and a member of St. James UMC?” Does that or would that ever even enter our thoughts or be a part of the response of who we are?

Last week we spoke of baptism and God’s love for each of us as we renewed our baptismal vows. There is nothing we can do to earn this love because it is by grace, a gift, that we are a member of God’s family. The Psalmist today reminds us that what and whom God created (each of us), God knows. Creation can only yearn to know God. For while the infinite (God) can comprehend the finite, the finite (us) cannot begin to grasp the infinite. Yet there is a relationship, the wonder that it exists and the awe of appreciation for the gift. In other words, even though we don’t earn God’s love, as a child of God we support each other or what we call church. This is what we were made for ... God. Yet if were to list our priorities, what would we discover?

If we looked at our checkbooks or debit statements, what might that tell us about our priorities? It is not a secret that “money talks”. In other words, where we decide to spend our money speaks to who we are and what we value. People often vote or make a statement with how they choose to

spend or not spend money. Many people who are vegetarians or vegans, people that do not eat meat, make a statement every time they grocery shop. By not purchasing meat, they are NOT supporting the meat industry. Lobbyists or those with special interests give money to political officials or programs in order to promote their agendas or what is important to them. How do we discern what we spend and where we spend? Probably the answer differs somewhat for all of us. Yet as children of God, and more specifically, members of St. James UMC, we are all responsible for the ministry here which includes how much and how we spend money in ministry. Just like our homes, we have a budget here at St. James in order to share the good news or the love of God in Christ.

This past week at our FOCUS meeting it was shared by all present that our proposed budget for 2012 is not balanced. There is a shortage of approximately \$25,000.00 in giving, be it pledged or unpledged funds. Even though we have lost members, we have also gained new members. We all recognize that our economic times are a challenge for many of us. How do we continue ministry and keep moving forward? Those that have not pledged will be receiving letters inviting them to pledge. In addition, we need to find ways to continue the ministry we have been called to do. Just as those in today's gospel have been called to share the good news, so are we. As part of God's family, we are called to hear God's voice, to dream new dreams, and follow God's vision. But how do we do that?

May I make the assumption that all of us want change here at St. James? We want certain programs to continue, we want more people to attend, we want a balanced budget, etc., etc., etc. Yet are we willing to

change? If we are honest, most of us want to keep doing what we do, but somehow expect different results. There is a story about a woman who brought home a plaque that said, "Prayer changes things." She put it in her kitchen, above her sink. Her husband came home, and said, "Take that down, please." She said, "Why? Don't you believe in prayer?" He said, "Yes, but I don't believe in change."

Whether we believe in change or not, certain change is inevitable. My mother shares with me quite often that: "I look in the mirror and think where did that old woman come from?" Other change is chosen. We have had some changes here this past year. We started an annual dinner/theatre ministry to assist with our budget. Chiavetta's chicken BBQ is an answer to how we can still have dinners to evangelize or share about who we are to our community in addition to supporting our budget. This year we have scheduled one Chiavetta's BBQ for the months of May through Sept. We have opened a store and offer a bottle and can deposit to support our budget. Are there other ways we can offer our time or our talent in order to be in ministry? Although some change is inevitable like aging, other change may be by choice, but not just for the sake of change. In our life of faith, change is determined by what our mission is. Mission drives change. Our overall mission as church is: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World. We do not need to be doing this or that because other churches do it, not even if they are successful. We are here for a specific reason or mission that is ordained by God.

So how do we, members of the St. James family, live as faithful members of God's family in 2012? Maybe another way to phrase it would be "What does it mean for all of us at St. James to follow Jesus?"

Bruce Larson tells this story in his book, "Faith for the Journey." Once there was a successful factory that made drills. One day the owner told his corporate officials that he was going to retire and that he had chosen his son as his successor. At the next board meeting the son asked his four vice presidents, "What are your goals for the company for the next 5 to 10 years?"

One vice-president replied, "Well sir, we're looking at new sizes and shapes for different drills."

The son then dropped his bombshell. "I have news for you – there is no market for drills." One could feel the tension in the air. He continued, "From now on we will not think drills. We will not sell drills. We'll sell holes! People don't want to buy a drill; they want to make a hole!"

As they began to think of other ways to create holes they developed, among other methods, lasers for hole drilling. This attitude and priority change with other innovations, kept this company in business.

As a church, we are not about producing and maintaining a budget. We ARE about being in ministry with each other and the world. In this season of Epiphany, we are to discover the deeper meaning of the person of Jesus Christ, to understand him more deeply, to love him more sincerely, and to walk with him more intimately. This second Sunday after the

Epiphany tells us in particular that even though we might have doubts, and are not sure about tomorrow or maybe we are just plain caught up in our daily activities trying to secure our lives in this world, that there is One who see us and knows us even better than we know ourselves. We may not always get everything we want, but we follow One who provides for all that we need.

When we look in the mirror, what do we see? What do you see when you look around this sanctuary at all these people? Go on look at each other! Have you ever really looked at the faces of those who sit in front of you or behind you or on the far left side or the far right side?

What do you see when you look out at the world through the newspapers you read and the television you watch? Do you see a world filled with piles and piles of rocks or do you see cathedrals?

When Jesus first laid eyes on his would-be disciples he didn't see a pile of rocks, he saw the beginnings of a cathedral, a church. Jesus looked at the likes of Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathaniel and saw great potential, great God-given potential. He didn't see rocks, he saw diamonds in the rough. Jesus didn't see a bunch of uneducated, salty, low-income fishermen, he didn't focus on the "what appeared to be," he saw "what could be".

May we hear God calling us this morning, to follow Jesus and become who we are called to be, knowing that wherever we are, God is always with us. Amen, Amen and Amen.

