

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
January 27, 2019
The Reverend Rick Veit

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN.

We care for, we honor and respect everyone, and we bless the Lord, our great God, by following the law. That is what the scriptures are about today.

First, the Gospel of Luke and Paul's First Letter to the people of Corinth, also known as the Corinthians.

We care for, we honor and respect everyone, especially those who are weak, the less honorable, the less respectable people, the inferior ones. They are as much a part of the body as those who are strong. In fact, in God's eyes, and therefore in ours as well, those people, the weak, are to be the most honored. Jesus, as King of kings, Lord of lords, the Messiah, Jesus washes the feet of ordinary people. That is the symbolism of the priestly stole. It is a towel to serve and wash feet. Jesus, we, bring good news to the poor. We proclaim release to those who live in captivity, both externally (you may have literally been held captive or captive within your job, your relationships) and internally (you are captive on the inside of your being, captive with sin, with repression, with depression). We recover sight for the blind and let the oppressed go free. While the oppression refers specifically to the Israelites mourning their exile and from their consequences to sin, we help people who are oppressed by poverty or addiction or perhaps more subtly, the oppression of arrogance. We honor the entire body of people, everyone, everything in the entire world and universe, because everything has value and is a gift from God, especially those things, those people who are hard to recognize as valuable. Everything is important in God's eyes because everything was created by God.

Speaking of honoring those in great need, did you know we were burglarized last Saturday?
(walk to the rear of the nave)

We caught them on camera. The person forced the large double doors open to the sanctuary. They walked right in, walked to the left, looked around, and then proceeded to walk and explore the entire church property. Wanda and I and a police officer watched it on video. They went into the Guild Room, oddly three different times, and did not take a thing. They wandered through the basement, upstairs, and into the choir room. Unfortunately, they wandered into Betsy's office and stole her computer, and then, ironically, a clock that was on top of the organ. The clock was worth about \$5. The computer a little more. ****I wish we would have been here. We could have given him something to eat, perhaps some money. But we were not. It was a Saturday. He wandered in, stole a few items, and then went on his way. I wonder if he got anything from the Little Free Pantry? I hope so.

I love that great quote from Mr. Rogers, Fred Rogers, who said, "I believe that appreciation is a holy thing – that when we look for what's best in a person we happen to be with at that moment,

we're doing what God does all the time. So, in loving and appreciating our neighbor, we're participating in something sacred."

This family of St. Mark's includes the wealthy, the middle and poor class, and those who are homeless and the criminals. We are one family and we are called to honor and respect everyone, especially those who are considered inferior and weak. And in doing so, we participate in something that is sacred, blessed by the Lord.

If you had seen the homeless person walk in, or even take the computer, what would your response have been? If just walking in, perhaps help him or her. If stealing something, ask for it back and offer to give them something. If the computer was worth \$200, give him \$400.

We learned about this from Isaiah (61:1ff) during the 7th and 8th centuries BC, about 2,700 years ago. And then Jesus referenced it about 2,000 years ago, 700 years after Isaiah. We are still referencing it today! Why? Because it is the way of the Lord.

Jesus, after being baptized, filled with the power of the Spirit, after being tempted by the devil for 40 days while in the desert, then returns to Galilee, his home area, to begin his adult ministry. He was dynamic and exciting, praised by everyone, teaching in the synagogues. In the town of Nazareth, he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, which then led to his teaching and Jesus' intended message that he was, in fact, the one that Isaiah had been talking about. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This echoes Mary's words, the mother of Jesus, from the Magnificat (Luke 1:52-53) – He lifts up the lowly and sends the rich away empty.

In the Original, or Old Testament, Leviticus 25, there was to be a Year of the Lord's Favor, a sabbath year every seven years to particularly praise and honor and worship God. Then there was the Year of the Jubilee, a particularly honorable year every seven sabbath cycles, or 7x7 years. We serve all people and we bless God, we worship God.

Jesus rolled up the scroll. Everyone's eyes were fixed on him. Then he began to teach, to interpret the scriptures. And he had the audacity to say, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He had the audacity probably because he was the Messiah, the one who Isaiah had been referring. But the people loved it. They were mesmerized by this great teacher.

Help others, and respect and honor all parts of the family, the body, including the parts that seem insignificant. Next, praise the Lord, bless the Lord, by following the law.

The Psalms are always filled with giving praise, glory, and fear, or awe, to the Lord. Why? Because God is our strength and our redeemer. He gives us what we need to be strong in life. He has given us the law, which has been fulfilled through Jesus Christ. He redeems us, picks us up when we go astray. He welcomes us back. Psalm 19 includes "The heavens declare the glory of God...although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world." Praise and bless the Lord with everything, every part of you. God's message will come through. The law of the

Lord is perfect. Study and know the law. Study and know Jesus our Savior, our Lord, who is the fulfillment of the law.

In Nehemiah, we learn that Ezra blesses the LORD, the great God. All the people respond, “Amen, Amen (so be it. So be it.),” and they lifted up their hands. Life was better for them. After being exiled by the Babylonians, the Persians opened the door for the Jewish people to return to their homeland. The Jews were even able to rebuild their Temple in the late 6th century BC after it had been ransacked and destroyed.

We praise and bless God. And when praising God, there is no need to be reserved. Praise however you are meant to praise – hands lifted high or low, voices loud or soft or silent. May the Holy Spirit fill you when worshipping the LORD.

Philosopher and Civil Rights Activist, Abraham Joshua Heschel, once said, “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement, (to) get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.” We worship, trust, and praise God in the good times and in the bad. And when we worship, God will open our eyes to the amazing things going on around us. We are to respond by giving glory to God for all of it.

And so, when life is good, serve those in need and praise the LORD. When life is bad, serve those in need and praise the LORD. You will become healthier by helping others, by helping your own family. You will become healthier by praising the LORD. And everyone is family, the burglar and the best of the best. That is how God intended it to be.