



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
6-22-14

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; all else be nought to me, save that thou art.”

A sermon in two parts.

Part One: The Good Life

That’s what you see on large billboards when you enter the state of Nebraska. “Welcome to the Good Life.”

For all of the years we lived in Nebraska, I sort of cringed inside each time I read that. Just what is this good life offered in Nebraska? I know that we hear plenty about living life to its fullest – ads , tv, friends, all around us we are encouraged to pursue the “Good Life”. And despite all of the advertising hype, I think there is a natural longing inside all of us. We want a good life. And how do we make our lives matter, count for something, not miss out on anything? Rarely is the life we are currently living enough for us – our lives seem too small for us. We think that we have to attain something more- if we can just attain the right things, then we will be happy, we’ll be contented, we’ll really be living. So, the larger house, better job, newer car, certain amount in savings, flat screen tv, better snowmobile, boat, trip out of the country- that quest for affluence and leisure causes cravings that war within us. It leaves us going through life unhealthily competitive, bitter, angry, hopelessly restless, not at ease, basically unhappy because there is always more we don’t have. Pursuit of the good life becomes emotionally and spiritually damaging.

How important it is to recognize that we are misled in thinking that more possessions will bring us happiness. It’s to recognize that being a friend of the world draws us from the focus of being a friend of God. It’s to recognize that peaceableness, gentleness, mercy, being willing to serve and yield.....

God yearns for the spirit he has made to dwell within us. That spirit is the same spirit that experiences the longings, the restlessness, that desire for more. If you are alive, you are restless and full of the spirit. It is part of being human (– yet in the words today from Jesus- fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.) What you do with your spirit or your soul creates your life.

“Those who focus on finding their life will lose it; and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; all else be nought to me, save that thou art.”

Part Two: Ordinary Radicals

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Awhile ago I mentioned a book that I received as a Christmas gift. It is a prayer book that draws from a variety of Christian resources for prayers and worship services. Its title is: Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals. We used this this book on Tuesday for its Midday Prayer service and we laughed a bit about the service being for ordinary radicals. Ordinary radicals. But then we did an African Bible Study on today's gospel reading and I realized that these words from Matthew are totally about being an ordinary radical.

This line of Jesus' about not coming to bring peace but a sword – those are problematic words for those of us who are used to hearing that Jesus is the Prince of peace, and blessed are the peacemakers, and when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples he said, peace be with you. I mean, this thing about peace is all through the New Testament. So, why this line today?

I believe we have a poor translation of the Greek and the correct understanding is that Jesus is saying, Do not think I have come to bring comfort to the earth, I have not come to bring comfort, or safety, or the good life, I have come with a sword. A sword that cuts away, removing the parts of our lives that bring death – death to the body, death to the soul.

Slash, remove the offending part of your family, your own body, cut yourself away from those with influence, those who ask you to cheat, ask you to lie to get ahead in a job, ask you to ignore God, ask you to honor someone or something other than God's ways. Slash, slash, live as an ordinary radical.

Accept being maligned, accept being not comfortable.

Accept being a disciple, living a disciplined life of following someone as your leader – someone who is not you. Be loyal to and follow your leader.

Accept humility and don't think you are the end all.

Accept that you are valuable.

Accept being courageous and be willing to speak out for justice. Do not be afraid.

Accept loving enemies.

Accept honoring gentleness, patience, service to others.

Ordinary radicals. That is who we are asked to be.

I have a song on a CD that ends with these lines. “When it's all been said and done, there is just one thing that matters, did I do my best with what I had, did I live my life for truth? Did I live my life for you?”

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; all else be nought to me, save that thou art.”

Thanks be to God.