

GIFTS WITHIN

WE USE PHRASES LIKE “WALKING THE WALK”, “PUTTING YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS”, “ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS” TO CHALLENGE IF SOMEONE REALLY BELIEVES WHAT THEY CONFESS OR PROFESS. BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST IS LIKE ALL THAT, IT IS BEING IN THE SPOTLIGHT WHETHER YOU WANT TO BE OR NOT. MANY HAVE SLIPPED BACK INTO THE SHADOWS NOT TO BE HEARD OR SEEN FROM.

REMEMBER WHEN THE CHURCH SPOKE WITH AUTHORITY AND GUIDED PEOPLE, FAMILIES, AND INSTITUTIONS? WHERE ARE WE TODAY? HAVE TOO MANY OF US REMAINED IN THE SHADOWS – SILENT? THAT IS A QUESTION ONLY EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US CAN ANSWER. SUCH A SITUATION NEVER HAPPENS OVERNIGHT. IT IS LIKE THAT RECORD NEEDLE THAT SLOWLY DETERIORATES AND ONLY BY CHANGING IT OUT DO WE REALIZE HOW BAD THE SOUND, THE CLARITY HAD BECOME. YOU PROBABLY CAN THINK OF OTHER THINGS THAT WE DON'T REALIZE HAVE DETERIORATED UNTIL WE REPLACE THEM.

IN THE BEGINNING OF TODAY'S READING THE DISCIPLES ASK FOR MORE FAITH, WHY? IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES JESUS HAS SPOKEN OF FORGIVENESS, AND THE DISCIPLES BELIEVE IT IS AN IMPOSSIBLE THING TO DO WITHOUT MORE FAITH! HOW MANY TIMES DID JESUS SPEAK OF FORGIVENESS OR TO FORGIVE IN THE GOSPELS, OVER 30 TIMES? **IT IS A BASIC, FOUNDATIONAL STONE OF OUR FAITH, OF BEING A DISCIPLE! THE OTHER POINT TO BE MADE HERE IS GOD KNOWS IT IS GOOD FOR US! FOR OUR HEALTH AND WELL BEING. THE MEDICAL PROFESSION KNOWS OUR HEALTH IS **DIRECTLY** RELATED TO OUR ABILITY TO FORGIVE. NO MATTER THE “SIZE” OF THE RESENTMENT, THE GRUDGE OR WHATEVER JESUS IS TELLING US “LET IT GO”. UNLIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE KNOW THAT BY THE GRACE OF GOD WE ARE ABLE IN OUR OWN WEAKNESS TO THROW OFF THAT BURDEN OF UNFORGIVENESS. THERE IS NO REASON TO HOLD ON TO IT!!!**

THERE IS AN INTERESTING STORY IN JESUS' RESPONSE IN RELATIONSHIP TO FAITH AND THE MULBERRY TREE MENTIONED. PEOPLE IN JESUS' DAY KNEW THIS MULBERRY TREE WAS REALLY A SYCAMINE TREE. THIS TREE HAD A VERY INTRICATE ROOT SYSTEM. THE RABBIS SAID THAT IT WOULD TAKE OVER 600 YEARS TO UNTANGLE THE ROOT SYSTEM! HOWEVER, JESUS IS SAYING WITH FAITH THEY COULD UNTANGLE THE ROOTS AND PLANT IT IN THE SEA!

NOW I BELIEVE JESUS IS SAYING HERE THAT THE FAITH GOD “GIFTS” US WITH, CAN DO GOOD AND AMAZING THINGS! ROMANS 12:5-6 *“So in Christ we who are many are one body, and each member belongs to one another. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.”* JUST LIKE THE DISCIPLES WE DON'T HAVE TO GO AROUND ASKING GOD “GIVE ME MORE FAITH”. IN COLOSSIANS WE ARE TOLD WE ARE “COMPLETE” IN CHRIST, THROUGH HIS BAPTISM, HIS DEATH, AND HIS RESURRECTION. ARE WE PERFECT? DON'T THINK SO, BUT BY GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE WE ARE FORGIVEN!!!

THIS MORNING WE “CELEBRATE” THAT PROMISE BY COMING TO THE COMMUNION TABLE, HIS TABLE, HUMBLY CONFESSING OUR SINS AND GOING AWAY KNOWING WE HAVE BEEN RESTORED AND FORGIVEN. IF THIS SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION HAS BECOME ANYTHING LESS MEANINGFUL THEN LETS GET TOGETHER AND TALK ABOUT IT. THIS SACRAMENT IS GOD'S WAY OF COMING AND MEETING US IN A MYSTERY THROUGH EARLY ELEMENTS. WE, AS METHODISTS, BELIEVE THAT CHRIST IS PRESENT THROUGH THE BREAD AND WINE IN A UNIQUE SPIRITUAL WAY, BUT THE ELEMENTS ARE NOT ACTUALLY HIS BODY AND BLOOD. WE DO NOT BELIEVE IN TRANSUBSTANTIATION WHERE THE ELEMENTS BECOME THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST OR DO WE BELIEVE THAT COMMUNION IS JUST A MEMORIAL OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

WE HAVE ALSO BEEN “GIFTED” AS PAUL TELLS TIMOTHY. “GOD DIDN'T GIVE US A SPIRIT THAT IS TIMID BUT ONE THAT IS POWERFUL, LOVING AND SELF-CONTROLLED” THIS POWERFUL RELATES BACK TO JESUS SPEAKING OF THE FAITH TO HIS DISCIPLES THAT COULD UPROOT A TREE AND PLANT IT IN THE SEA. THE “POWER” OF FAITH INDEED CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS, NOT LITERALLY BUT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD THE “MOUNTAINS” OF SIN, HOPELESSNESS AND MANY OTHER THINGS CAN BE MOVED!

WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE BIBLE WITH SPIRITUAL EYES AND WHAT CAN BE DONE IN IT. LIFE LONG CHAINS CAN BE BROKEN. SOON WE WILL COME UPON ADVENT AND THAT WELL KNOWN VERSE FROM ISAIAH 61:1 *“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.”* REALLY LOOK AT THIS VERSE AND FOCUS ON THE WORDS. WE ARE NOT TALKING LITERALLY ABOUT THE POOR, THE CAPTIVES OR THE PRISONERS. **JESUS CAME TO ENRICH THE POOR OF SPIRIT, TO “FREE” THE CAPTIVES TO SIN OR WHATEVER BINDS THEM AND FREE THE PRISONERS,** YES MANY OF US EVEN TODAY ARE IN PRISON, HELD BY SOMETHING THAT WILL NOT LET US REACH THAT POTENTIAL WHICH GOD DESIRES FOR US. IT IS WHY THIS MORNING IS SO MEANINGFUL AND IMPORTANT. **COMMUNION, THAT**

MEANS OF GRACE THAT ALLOWS US IN JESUS' PRESENCE TO CAST IT ALL OFF AND LEAVE IT WITH HIM. PSALM 55:22 *“ Pile your troubles on God’s shoulders— He’ll carry your load, He’ll help you out. He’ll never let good people topple into ruin.”* OR MATTHEW 11:28-30 *“ Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”* **NOW I CALL THAT AN OFFER WE CAN'T REFUSE!!!** THIS IS THE VERY THING OFFERED THIS MORNING AT THIS HIS TABLE.

GOD HAS ALSO GIVEN US A SPIRIT THAT IS LOVING AND SELF-CONTROLLED. HOW MUCH OF THAT “SPIRIT” ARE WE LETTING SHOW TO THOSE AROUND US. I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE WE DESIRE TO BE AROUND AND IN THE COMPANY OF ARE THOSE WHO ARE LOVING AND SELF-CONTROLLED. JUST LIKE JESUS THEY COME TO US AND ACCEPT US JUST AS WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE WITHOUT CONDITIONS.

NOW THE LAST PART OF THE GOSPEL MAY BE SOMETHING THAT MIGHT GET UNDER OUR SKIN A LITTLE. JESUS IS TELLING HIS DISCIPLES THAT WHEN YOU HAVE DONE ALL REQUIRED OF YOU THAT WE DESERVE NO SPECIAL CREDIT, WE HAVE ONLY DONE OUR DUTY. NOW HOW MUCH DOES THAT RUN CONTRARY TO MUCH OF CULTURE. WE HAVE SO MANY AWARDS FOR THIS AND THAT, BUT THINK ABOUT IT, AREN'T THOSE PEOPLE JUST DOING THEIR JOB.

I HAVE TO LAUGH WHEN WATCHING A FOOTBALL GAME AND THE DEFENSIVE PLAYER GETS TO THE QUARTERBACK AND TACKLES HIM FOR A LOSS. ISN'T THAT HIS JOB? OR A RECEIVER CATCHES THE BALL FOR A TOUCHDOWN AND THE CELEBRATION BEGINS, AGAIN ISN'T THAT HE GETS THE “BIG BUCKS”? WE ARE IN A LIKE POSITION AS DISCIPLES, FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. HE GAVE US IN HIS MINISTRY HOW AND WHAT WE ARE TO DO, IF WE ARE HIS DISCIPLES. SOME OF HIS LAST WORDS IN JOHN 13:34-35 *“Let Me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are My disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.”* **DO PEOPLE SEE THAT LOVE FOR EACH OTHER OR ARE THEY “BLINDED” BY THE SURFACE BICKERING AND GOSSIP?** FOR MANY THAT LOVE IS WITHIN, IT IS A GIFT FROM GOD AS SAID IN TIMOTHY, BUT WE MUST LET IT OUT, LET IT SHOW AND BE VULNERABLE TO OTHERS.

IN CLOSING -- Reaching the end of a job interview, the human resources person asked a young engineer fresh out of MIT what kind of a salary he was looking for. "In the neighborhood of \$140,000 a year, depending on the benefits package." "Well, what would you say to a package of

5-weeks vacation, 14 paid holidays, full medical & dental, company matching retirement fund to 50% of salary, & a company car leased every 2 years...say, a red Corvette?" "Wow! Are you kidding?" "Yeah, but you started it."

A servant's heart is sorely lacking in our society today. God's people should have a servant's heart. AMEN.