

LENT 2

YEAR C

GENESIS 15:1-12, 17-18

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

LUKE 13:31-35

MARCH 16, 17, 2019

The other day I was at my class in Des Moines. Our topic for the day was about evil. It was an interesting discussion about natural evils as well as evils that are more intentional. We talked about natural evils as being illness and death. Natural evils would also include natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods and earthquakes. These are things we have little or no control over. They are evils because they cause hardship for people. Evils that are more intentional are things we do to each other that bring harm in one way or another. These would include killing someone, stealing from them, gossip and other actions that bring harm or injury to another person or to God's creation.

One of the more interesting parts of the class was a video where a black Baptist preacher told about an experience he had the day Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. The preacher said he was flying to a speaking engagement and did not know that Martin Luther King had been shot and killed. The preacher described calling a taxi and noticing the appearance of the driver and thought about using another cab. The driver was white man not dressed so well and smelling a bit. The preacher said he did use the cab but noticed that the driver kept looking at him through the mirror. He noticed that the driver had tears in his eyes. The driver finally asked the preacher if he had heard the news. The preacher answered that he had not heard any news since he just got off the plane. The driver proceeded to tell of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The preacher admitted to himself and to others that he had unfairly judged a man based on the color of his skin and on his appearance. He went on to teach about the evil we do to each other based on our biases. Instead of

loving our neighbor we judge them as not being valuable people of God. We practice our religion instead of sharing God's love.

Philippians 3:17-19 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians. Part of his letter was to thank them for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ but also to thank them for supporting him in this ministry. In this reading today, Paul shares a message that invites the people to imitate him as he imitates Jesus Christ. They are to imitate the Lord's love and service. Paul is speaking of those that say one thing and do another. They put on a show but are not imitating Jesus Christ. More specifically Paul speaks of those that imitate false teachers that value their ritual practices than they do their people. When Paul speaks about imitating he is not saying to imitate Paul but Jesus. Paul says in Philippians 1:22 that to live is Christ and to die is gain. He is saying that we are to look at Christ as our example of humility and self-sacrifice.

Would I want our church kids to imitate me? Do I teach one thing but do something else? Do I really want Jeremiah to imitate me? In some ways he does imitate me. He enjoys teasing because he has seen me also tease people. He has learned sarcasm because he has heard me. There are other things he imitates me in. Jeremiah knows the importance of being at church when it is time to be here. A couple of weeks ago he had to choose between coming to confirmation class and his show choir practice. The show choir practice was held one Wednesday evening because they had a competition approaching. They added the practice because there had been

so many snow days. We left it to Jeremiah to decide what to do. He decided that confirmation class was more important than show choir practice. Some might say he chose this way because he is a preacher's kid. It is also true because he knows what I think about the church and Christian education. He imitates me in the things that are not so good but also in the things that are important and good.

Paul says that we are not to put our minds on earthly things. When Paul speaks of earthly things he is teaching about those things that are enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ. During the season Lent we focus on the disciplines of self-denial, self-examination and prayer. We are humble as we recall the teaching of our Lord. We change our lives of pride and self-righteousness to the Lord's life of service, sacrifice and humility. Paul says that their true citizenship is in heaven. Because they have their citizenship in heaven they do not have evil intentions but they seek to love and serve their neighbors.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

We are to stand firm in the ways of the Lord. We live according to the example of Jesus. What did Jesus do? He ministered to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. He provided healing for lepers, women with issues of blood and many with unclean spirits. Jesus ministered to those others regarded as enemies and people seen as suspicious. If we are to imitate Jesus Christ we seek to care for those that are different from us. Maybe can even think about ourselves being the different ones and the others being the normal ones.

The preacher in the taxicab came to see a taxi driver in a different way. He came to see a man that was compassionate for the death of a righteous

man. The evil thoughts of the preacher became a relationship of unity as they each mourned together.

If we imitate Christ we also share love with one another. He speak kindly of each other. Our religious activities take a back seat to our Christian witness. We love as we have been loved and we serve as we have been served. Our ritual does not get in the way of our service. We do not seek to do evil but we search for ways to love. AMEN