

Sermon, Sunday, March 17th

-Paul's letter to the Philippians was written, as were most of the Epistle letters, to this community at Philippi to address specific issues in the community.

-According to Paul, there appeared to be a disconnect or discord within the Christian community in Philippi, which Paul tried to address by encouraging humility with a view towards unity.

-Paul also tries to deal with some of the negative teaching and consequences of some false teachers.

-The other thing interesting about the letter to the Philippians is that it is believed that Paul was in prison, most likely in Rome, when this letter was written.

-In last week's meditation, we talked about how Paul began as Saul and how he spent a large portion of his life persecuting Christians. This part of Paul's was something that he was proud of and was devoted to fanatically before his conversion. So fanatical was Paul that he lost perspective and blindly followed all of his beliefs, which justified hate in the name of God and helped to perpetuate violence against Christians.

-When people, including Paul, find, in their own minds that God has priorities other than love and compassion one can become self-absorbed and matching behavior will follow.

-Many times in our own lives we become devoted to things that bring us away from God and we begin to see only those things and not God. We can become obsessed with only what we think is important.

-Yet in our reading today Paul tells us that all of those things that we think are important are nothing.

-All of those status things, those things that we give priority to mean nothing.

-Paul talks about a reversal of values, a change from his past to the present.

-We talk about a person “with a past” and usually we see this as a negative thing, something that one needs to get past, forget about.

-In order to truly understand our lives we need to know our past and in some ways embrace our past, including those things that we might not be proud of.

-Paul understood his past and he was fully aware of who he was in his past life as Saul, including I am sure those things that he might not have been proud of.

-Part of understanding our past and helping that past influence our present is to understand and see those times when we were proud and experienced privilege. The thing is that we need to see these times in perspective.

-We see in this reading Paul stating that all of this privilege, he had in the past is something that as Christians we shall set aside in order to serve.

-We are challenged to move beyond our own sense of privilege, to become a person in whom Christ dwells, in the here and now.

-Holly Hearon a professor of New Testament at the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana states it in this way; “Paul is able to trust (have faith) in Christ. It is living into the faithfulness of Christ that enables Paul to view his past differently. For Paul, that means not clinging to the benefits of privilege; for others, who have never experienced privilege, it might mean claiming a heightened sense of self as a result of knowing themselves as person with and in whom Christ dwells.”

-It is easy for us to become tied up in those things that society sometimes tells us is important, those things that can bring us away from God.

-And yet what has become before is not what has to be the present.

-In our reading from Isaiah we see something new happening.

-The reading from Isaiah is part of long salvation oracle that goes from Isaiah chapter 43:14 to chapter 44:5. This is a proclamation oracle that runs from Isaiah chapter 43:14 to chapter 44:5 and is a proclamation of deliverance to the Jewish people exiled in Babylon.

-This reading announces that God is going to use Cyrus and his Persian forces to defeat Babylon and release captive Israel and allow them to return to their homeland.

-This text describes what God has done for the Jewish people in the past with the release of captive Israel from Egypt and their escape through the Red Sea.

-This reading tells us that God has and is working in new and wonderful ways. As Mark Throntveit, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis states; "The newness consists in the message that God is not limited to acting in the same old ways to accomplish new acts of salvation, and that Israel, and we, will be surprised at the contemporary relevance of God to our lives, here and now, if only we are attentive.

-We must remember that God is ever present and ever forgiving. This life-giving forgiveness is today, not in the past.

-We are challenged to move out of the past, to move beyond our own pasts.

-To move out of those places where we have been that take us away from God, those places that in the light of Christ mean little.

-We are challenge to see a God of new ways, a God of new life and to be a conduit for new life in the world today.

-Our lives do not need to be defined by our pasts, by those things which have kept us from God. As God is constantly doing new things, as shown in Isaiah, we are challenged to live in new ways.

-We are challenged to let go of the old ways, so that when we look in those mirrors we see someone who is not distracted by the trappings of society. We see a person who is doing new things in new ways, working towards a new world.

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