

“The Way of The Cross”

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UCC at The Villages
October 6th, 2013
27th Sun. in Pentecost ©
*World Communion &
Blessing of the Animals*

Psalm 37:1-9

Luke 17:1-9

[*Jesus said,*]

“Servants don’t deserve special thanks for doing what they are supposed to do.”

Luke 17:10

Let us pray... O God,

Thank you for opportunities to help bear the cross of others

when natural disasters strike as well as in the midst

of the ongoing disasters of poverty and racism;

And thank you for the understanding that comes of just being with people

who are different from us – who can inspire us how to bear our own crosses.

Amen

This morning, we will take some time to hear about the ministry of

the UCC Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi and

our mission team’s experience last month, participating in the work there.

First, let me say a little bit about our scripture lessons –

which come from the lectionary for today.

They speak of the challenges and risk that come with

following Christ in this world – that come with following the way of the cross,

which is quite literally a thankless job when Jesus says:

“Servants don’t deserve special thanks for doing what they are supposed to do.”

We need to put those hard words in a context:

Jesus is speaking to both his followers – and his hosts.

It has been evident in the texts themselves that Jesus’ strategy was to convert

not only those who would go out to bring the Good News to a wider world,

but also those who would welcome them.

He was endeavoring to bridge the gap between the wealthy, landowners

and those who were homeless – by changing attitudes.

He was talking to the homeowners when he said,

“Servants don’t deserve special thanks for doing what they are supposed to do.”

Yet in verse 10, Jesus was still talking to them – as well as his apostles, when he said,

And that’s how it should be with you.

When you’ve done all you should, then say,

“We are merely servants, and we have simply done our duty.”

Jesus is putting homeowner and homeless, master and servant,

rich and poor on the same level – to create empathy and change attitudes...

Willard, p. 2

When I read this text, I am reminded of something my mother told me
about my grandfather when he was a young man,
and visited his aunt's family to work on their farm in Iowa.

He was up way before sunrise to work in the fields –
and hours later, he came back to the house for breakfast,
where his aunt met him and said,

“Harold, could you eat an egg?”

To which, my grandfather replied, “An egg?!” [as in, “How about 6 eggs?”]

City slickers and country folk have a lot to teach each other,
and our experience at Back Bay Mission was no different
as we were thrown together with people from UCC churches
in Houston, TX and Port Charlotte, FL, of diverse ethnicities, young and old,
rich and poor, men and women, skilled and otherwise
as well as other volunteers, staff, people in need, homeowners and homeless...
We will begin our presentation with a look at my sketchbook portraits
of most – but not all of the people we met, as well as ourselves...

The Back Bay Mission experience is primarily oriented for work teams
of various skills – including master artisans,
to build, demolish, or renovate houses as affordable housing –
similar to Habitat For Humanity's projects,
but also to repair houses for poor homeowners.

Skilled staff set forth the job priorities of the day, directions to the sites,
and provided tools, equipment, and materials.

Some of those projects included
a woman's house partially destroyed by fire, another house with water damage
caused by improperly installed windows,
another house that had to be gutted to be rebuilt, and helping a vet
move his belongings to government housing... [PaDre, Maureen]

Outreach programs include
the “Loaves & Fishes” hot meal as well as a food pantry, [Maureen],
and an adult day care facility “Micah Center” –
but no homeless shelter... [Marilyn]

The civil rights fight against racism has figured in Biloxi's history [Marilyn],
including the “wade-in” protests to desegregate beaches [Maureen],
which is why there are no longer any UCC churches there –
though Back Bay Mission survived [PaDre]...

Willard, p.3

Our response to lessons learned by our mission team on their visit to Biloxi, can be in terms of providing financial assistance to Back Bay Mission, developing our own local disaster response team, helping with outreach to the people living in the Ocala Forest, learning from other programs like Farmworkers Self Help in Dade City, as well as encouraging a church start to return the UCC to Biloxi. The kind of challenges before the people of Back Bay Mission at Biloxi and throughout our world may seem like moving a mountain, but Jesus said that even that could be done with faith even the size of a mustard seed.

By the way, our mission trip this year was unbudgeted, and I want to acknowledge our Missions Ministry Team and an anonymous donor who provided financial help for our volunteers' registration and fuel costs.

Thanks to them and thanks to you, too, for that support and thanks to those who went on our first mission trip...

Jesus was warning us that we shouldn't serve to get applause, but he was also reminding us that everybody likes to be appreciated when they do a good job.

Preparations are already being planned for us to return to and learn from Back Bay Mission, with a mission trip scheduled for May 11 to 17 next year...

Amen

Our lesson today from Psalm 37:1-9, is meant to reassure God's people despite all the injustice in the world.

We are challenged to continue to do the right thing and believe God will guide us...

37:1 Don't be annoyed by anyone who does wrong, and don't envy them.

2 They will soon disappear like grass without rain.

3 Trust the Lord and live right!

The land will be yours, and you will be safe.

4 Do what the Lord wants,

and he will give you your heart's desire.

5 Let the Lord lead you and trust him to help.

6 Then it will be as clear as the noonday sun that you were right.

7 Be patient and trust the Lord.

Don't let it bother you when all goes well for those who do sinful things.

8 Don't be angry or furious. Anger can lead to sin.

9 All sinners will disappear, but if you trust the Lord, the land will be yours.

Luke 17:1-9 [CEV]

17:1 Jesus said to his disciples:

There will always be something that causes people to sin.

But anyone who causes them to sin is in for trouble.

A person who causes even one of my little followers to sin

2 would be better off thrown into the ocean

with a heavy stone tied around their neck.

3 So be careful what you do.

Correct any followers of mine who sin,

and forgive the ones who say they are sorry.

4 Even if one of them mistreats you seven times in one day and says,

“I am sorry,” you should still forgive that person.

5 The apostles said to the Lord,

“Make our faith stronger!”

6 Jesus replied:

If you had faith no bigger than a tiny mustard seed,

you could tell this mulberry tree to pull itself up, roots and all,

and to plant itself in the ocean. And it would!

7 If your servant comes in from plowing or from taking care of the sheep,

would you say,

“Welcome! Come on in and have something to eat”?

8 No, you wouldn't say that. You would say,

“Fix me something to eat.

Get ready to serve me, so I can have my meal.

Then later on you can eat and drink.”

9 Servants don't deserve special thanks for doing

what they are supposed to do.

10 *And that's how it should be with you.*

When you've done all you should, then say,

“We are merely servants, and we have simply done our duty.”

