

OCTOBER 27, 2019-SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

SCRIPTURE LESSON JOEL 2:23-32, 2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18, LUKE 18:9-14

Here in the Old Testament book of Joel we see one of the best descriptions of God's concept of forgiveness and salvation. God put the past behind the people promising the joy of a future filled with good things. Where before they were made to suffer because of their lack of faith. Now they are being rewarded. As the lesson goes on notice it isn't just the Jews that will be blessed by God and forgiven God's Spirit will be "Poured out on All Flesh." God is claiming all people as children of God and including them all in the family of God. Even people like slaves are included and women who are normally to remain silent are to be prophets for God. This should help us understand why Jesus reaches out to women and includes them in his company. The criteria for salvation according to Joel is reaching out to God. So often we have people trying to set the criteria for salvation based church doctrine and the teachings of people not God.

The author of Timothy remembers that people often turned against him as he began his ministry but God was faithful to him and supported him during the hard times he had faced. God did this so that the message of God's love could be proclaimed and notice the Gentiles, the non-Jews are to be included in receiving the message of God. Again we are to reach out to all of God's people. According to Jewish law the Gentiles were not to be included. Yet here we see God reaching out to them. Again in the same way we are to reach out to all people and include them in the Gospel message of love. This simple idea lies at the heart of our tradition and we as Christians are to make it real in this world.

While last week's Gospel lesson was hard for me to preach, this week's is hard for some people to hear and I believe this is true even for some entire traditions. For almost all of the reformers there were differences in doctrine that they proclaimed and literally fought over. But one thing almost everyone agreed on. Salvation occurred not because of what we did. We could not do enough good things to earn or give enough money to buy salvation. It was received only as a gift from God. Here is one of the major differences between the Old Covenant based on the written law and the New Covenant based the Spirit of God within us. The Pharisee in our story believed that Salvation and righteousness came to him because he strove to obey the law of God, carved in stone, perfectly. It is this perfect obedience to God's law that made him the more righteous of the two men and guaranteed him going home declared righteous and blessed by God. But according to Jesus it is the Tax collector that was going to be forgiven and blessed by God, because he realized his need for God's forgiveness. The tax collector that worked for the Romans and was thus unclean because he would often have to go into Roman buildings, touch the Romans and their money with the emperor's picture on it. According to Jewish law there was no way he could be seen as righteous or blessed by God. What he did made him one of the greatest of sinners.

But Jesus says that of the two men it is he that will go home forgiven and blessed by God, rather than the Pharisee. You see the Pharisee's problem is he doesn't need God to be righteous. It is his own actions that make him righteous and forces God to bless him. Kind of like people or traditions that believe that they know the way to be righteous and it is only by following their way that "truth" righteousness can be achieved. Reality is none of us are good enough to earn God's grace and salvation. This is why none of us have any right to judge others and say who is included in God's way and who isn't. No real salvation starts without recognizing our need for God and building on our faith that God loves us, includes us, forgives us and makes us worthy to be a part of the chosen people of God. It is Faith in God that includes us in all the promises God has made to people like Joel, or Timothy or the Tax Collector. None of us are really worthy to judge others and we all should give thanks that God includes all people in God's plan of Salvation because that is the only way we can be included. Praise be to God.