

**Ephesians 2: 1-10**  
**Mark 6: 30-34**  
**July 22, 2012**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

Contrary to popular belief, the Apostle Paul is not an apostle of the angry God. Yes he believes that due to the sin of Adam and Eve humanity incurred the consequences of disobeying God. There is a difference between God's angry punishment and our experiencing the consequences of our seeking to live without God. Thus when Paul speaks of those who follow the ways of the world, addicted to body the cravings of the mind and body as being "objects of wrath" he means the very real consequences of living according to our craving for gratification and security. From Paul's view, and I agree with him, 99% of our suffering is human inflicted, by ourselves or others. It is a consequence of living-or trying to live- independent of God's love and grace.

Indeed, according to Paul, God shows just how *not* angry he is because in Jesus Christ he reaches out to all people in order to rescue us from this self-inflicted suffering.

He writes:

All of us also lived ...gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. *Like the rest, we were by nature we were objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.*

Can you feel Paul's passion here? We have been saved—that is, we have been rewired from a life dependent on the gratifying of our craving for the worldly life: material, psychological, sexual, intellectual, to a life completely satisfied to rely on God for our every

need. God has liberated us from this life in and through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For Paul grace is the gift. Faith is our response. We step out and actually seek God's help in living this life day by day.

Do we do this completely? Are you and I so thoroughly washed in the blood of Jesus that we never experience sensual desires, never are insecure and are always serene? Are we kidding? As many people have observed becoming spiritually reborn is to begin life over again. We have to learn how to live the new life. We have to forge new paths of behavior and thought patterns. Instead of following the well-worn and familiar paths of our habitual reactions, we have to begin to hack our way into a wilderness of unfamiliar ground. This cannot be done alone. The community of faith exists as a company of people on the same journey. Some of us have more experience, but we are all partners on the same journey.

What are the things we do to turn from our usual patterns of responding to life in general and people in particular? How do we cultivate new patterns of trust in God and the practice of being guided by his presence alone? In short, to quote from Paul, how do we become aware that...we are God's workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do? For guidance let us turn to Mark's gospel.

From Mark's terse account, the disciples are actively engaged *together* in Jesus' ministry. They eagerly gather to tell Jesus all they have done and taught. I do not suppose for a moment that everything they have done and taught has been a rousing success. I take it for granted that they have met with indifference and hostility; their attempted healings have failed to happen; they have gotten Jesus' teaching wrong, lost arguments with Pharisees and felt

resentment and jealousy when people said, "That's ok, I'll just wait for Jesus." But I also take it for granted that they have inspiring tales of people who did receive their ministry, who invited them into their homes and welcomed the message. They were people who now wanted to meet Jesus. Indeed that was the most exciting thing of all! As the result of their witness there were crowds of people eager to come to Jesus! Even as they speak with Jesus people are showing up in large groups.

From this I learn two practices that matter. The first is to get out with the message. It is ok to stumble and sometimes wonder if we are making a difference for Christ's ministry. The important thing is to be out there. Jesus does not waste our loving efforts because it is ultimately his work we are doing. As Paul says in others letters, we are ambassadors for Christ. We seek to represent him as the loving being he is. The second practice is critical: to be clear that our deepest desire is that people meet *Jesus*. You and I are nice people. Most churches describe themselves as friendly. But all that is beside the point. The point is, in our relationships with people is it our desire that they meet Jesus, the true source of life?

Which leads me to the next movement in this story: Jesus sees the crowds gathering. He recognizes that there is a time for disciples to have alone time with him; and so he takes them away to a remote place where they can spend time together.

Friends, from this we learn the critical practices of regular prayer, study and worship. How can we lead people to a Jesus we do not know on a personal level? How can we invite people to a living relationship with God through his son when we do not have one ourselves? It is in the quiet time we make for rest and meditation, reflecting of the scriptures and opening our

lives to God's love in Jesus that we come to realize that Jesus is *with us! We are not alone. This is his ministry. We are just his servants.* Our success does not depend on us but on him.

Reformer Martin Luther said that he prayed an hour every day. When he had a particularly busy day he prayed for *two* hours. Why is this? Clearly Martin Luther wanted to enter the day in God's strength not his own. Every day needs to include intentional time for time with Jesus, whether through reading the Bible, a devotional guide or simply sitting quietly listening to the wind and to birdsong, noticing the quality of light and encountering the quiet presence of God.

It is then and only then that we begin to create new spiritual habits which sustain us in our journey to reflect to the world less of the driven scattered life of the culture and more of the rooted and calm presence of Jesus. It is then and only then that we can look upon the people around us with the eyes of Jesus and have not judgment but compassion. It is then and only then that we have a living relationship with the Savior who we can invite others to meet.

Amen