

Sermon epiphany 6 2017

1 Happy are they whose way is blameless, *
who walk in the law of the LORD!

The law is the law is the law!!!!

Our scripture today is full of follow and obey. The lectionary gave us a choice of two passages from the Old Testament. The Deuteronomy lesson says “if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish;” The other is in **“Sirach 15:15-20**

If you choose, you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.

He has placed before you fire and water;
stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.

Before each person are life and death,
and whichever one chooses will be given.

For great is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power and sees everything;

his eyes are on those who fear him,
and he knows every human action.

He has not commanded anyone to be wicked,
and he has not given anyone permission to sin.

In our Gospel today Jesus makes us even more uncomfortable by honing the definitions and laws to a really small point. I remember when Jimmy Carter was president and he quoted today’s gospel about committing adultery in his heart. He took a lot of ridicule for that. It seems that many of us are hard pressed to give in

to such close definition of the law. It seems that our society today is focused on law and what to do with it. Who does it apply to, who needs to obey. It seems that in light of our readings today there should not be big questions about who obeys and who does not. I suppose it is largely because our hearts and minds live in two worlds; God's world and the world of man. The world of man frequently does not adhere to the laws of God and in some cases, even to the laws of man.

I just spent a week in El Salvador with the mission of miracles. That is a medical mission that is generated in our diocese. This is a mission that is close to my heart. I went with the first full mission and this time was my sixth time going to El Salvador. The prior 5 times I went I was practicing as a nurse. It was very rewarding and memorable each time. It has been several years since I went and have given up my nursing license so I thought I would probably never go again. This time I was asked to go as a pastoral care person. Now a Deacon in the Episcopal Church is a fully ordained clergy person. The job of a deacon is to bring the world into the church and the church into the world. As I spent some time in discernment over the decision to go I felt this was the perfect opportunity to bring the church into the world. It is an expensive venture but the money has always taken a back seat to all else each time I have gone.

This different role did not come without some doubt however. Number one I do not speak Spanish. I partnered with an interpreter that is very experienced and I really trust. She has gone on every one of these missions. Number two, I have never done this kind of counselling before on this scale. I have never been God's point person in this kind of situation. But there is one big thing I have always trusted as well, and that is God. If I am called to a mission of any sort I remember Jesus sending the disciples out two by two and telling them not to worry about what to say. God will give them the right words to say at the right time. I had to

keep telling myself that, until I sat with the first couple of folks who came to us for counsel and prayer. God was there. The words did flow; the prayer was said and heard.

The stories we heard were difficult and sometimes horrendous. One man came to us just weeping because he had been told the blindness in his left eye was permanent. His pain was so difficult but he was open to talking and praying with us. We were able to spend a long time with him and he left us with a smile. Maria and I promised to pray for him and for all the folks we saw, for the next 30 days. We heard terrible stories of gang violence, murder, extortion, corruption and degradation. Some folks have suffered so very much trauma that it is a marvel to see the faith that brings them through and continues to feed their soul. One couple that came to us had lived in a different area than the town we saw them in. They had been well off, they owned their own business and a large home. Their daughter was kidnapped and the ransom they paid was huge. They received her back in a condition that required weeks of hospitalization to get her back on her feet. The gang demanded more money which they paid. Then in the middle of a very dark night with just the clothes on their back they left that area on foot with their family. They have started life all over again and keep their home open to any traveler who comes their way who needs shelter. Their faith keeps them going with a spirit that affects everyone around them.

The people we saw were sent to us by the medical people who had done the screening for the care they needed. They did not always get the translation quite right. One woman sat with us and wondered what she was doing there. We told her that the folks said she was worried and sad about the death of her husband. “Oh that, he died 14 years ago I am doing fine about that. I am worried about the permit that I am trying to get for building my new house. But that is not really

worry. We asked her about her church affiliation. She told us she goes to an evangelical church 4 times a week and she prays for everyone in the USA and the medical mission every day. She sees the United States is having a hard time right now. We prayed for her and with her. It was quite a positive experience. We all left with a smile. I pray for her daily and she still makes me smile.

I came away with the feeling that the laws that we hear of today are at work and at the same time being trampled in that place. Many of the people are struggling and trying to work for a good life. The gangs in the parts of the countryside are all about power and money and evil. It is so blatant; so real. People fear for their homes; their children and their very lives but they do the best they can. They work hard to feed their families and they keep the faith in their life with the church and with God. I guess that is what is asked of all of us everywhere. We must follow the laws of society and also the laws of God. They may not always be the same or have the same goals but we have to figure it out and do the best we can.

Please include the people of El Salvador in your prayers. This is a difficult time for families who have relatives in the States. The atmosphere of fear around the possibility of deportation hangs heavy with them all. Even the families of those who are here legally fear that they will never be able to see their families again; that their families will never be together because of more stringent laws in the US.

It is a confrontation of God's law and the law of man that we all have to witness.