

## “Think About These Things”

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Philippians 4:4-8

December 13, 2009

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

It is important to set goals. Without goals we will minimize our efforts and accomplishments. You have heard it said, “Thos who fail to plan, plan to fail.” It has been my experience that these words ring true. There is yet another side of this equation hat is extremely important. It is the side that characterizes the plans and goals as whether or not they are right or wrong. What I am speaking about are the reasons why we set the goals in the first place. These are our values. Goals are what we want to accomplish. Values are the reason why we want to accomplish them. Values determine the worthiness of our efforts. Are the reasons based on self-serving? Are they motivated by jealousy or resentment? Do they come from a context of care and compassion? The reason why we set our goals is as important as what goals we do set. Especially when we are talking about choices and actins we set as goals for us a Christians.

Jim was a preacher’s kid, a PK. He was also a professor I had in seminary. His father was a pastor in Brooklyn, NY. Once a month Emanuel would come to visit Jim’s father. His father had no allergies yet once a month he would break out in hives. Emmanuel, once a month, would suffer stomachaches. Both men were a great deal of irritation to the other. When Emmanuel would come for a visit the pastor’s family would always be gone. Jim wanted to know why. So one day, upon Emanuel’s visit, Jim snuck back into the house and hid under the stairway, where he could both watch and listen.

Sitting in two worn, overstuffed chairs the men began. Emmanuel opened with a prayer, “Father, send down your Spirit and open the hearts which were hardened to your will.” Clearly meant for Jim’s father, the pastor.

Next came out a list of complaints towards the pastor (pastor was never in his office; pastor was always in his office, etc.). The two men continued to banter back and forth. Then came out another list. Emmanuel told of Mrs. Ferguson who became born again and now can interpret the scriptures as well as any. Emmanuel went on and then said, “Pastor what are we going to do?”

Behind the question was “Mrs. Ferguson was attacking Word and Sacrament ministry of their church and this would not do and could not be tolerated. Not only that, but Emmanuel wanted to keep Mrs. Ferguson from leaving the church. These were their goals. The “why” they wanted to do these lay in their values which were the same – serving God ad doing God’s will. Though these two disagreed on issues, they were in agreement on following God’s will. All their actions and decisions came out of a context of faith.

They didn’t ask “What’s in it for me?” Nor did they wonder “Who’s right and who’s wrong?” What drove their decisions and actions was “how do we proceed from what we believe?” Although they fought over what course of action to take they were in agreement about whose will they follow. Values of love, concern, patience, forgiveness, long suffering, being one with Christ are all taught through the Bible. When we act accordingly we serve Christ and thereby end up serving others.

***“Think about these things”*** writes Paul. God calls us to direct our paths (setting our goals) by what we believe, through faith, in obedience to Christ. The list of encouragements (whatever is pure just, lovely, gracious, etc.), are values. These find their basis in faith in God. We are called to act and react to situations in life based upon what we hold to be true, what we believe. Let me give you an example.

If you remember the story of Jacob and Esau you will recall Jacob had stolen Esau’s birthright that entitled him to the father’s estate. Jacob ran away from home after he had done that. Years have passed and Jacob now has to confront his brother. Esau is on one side of the river and Jacob on the other side. The night before Jacob wrestles with God (in the story an angel) and the wrestling match lasts all night. At the break of day Jacob demands and receives a blessing from God. The blessing comes in the form of a new name. God tells Jacob that from now on his name will be Israel, which means, “to struggle with God.”

Until this time Jacob, now named Israel, made decisions based on what was in it for him, who is right or wrong, etc. God has wrestled with Jacob and helps Jacob to see that he is to make decisions based on his belief in God and what God asks of him. From the conflict, through the wrestling, Jacob comes to realize that when decisions are based on what we believe and not how we feel, or what we desire, God blesses the decisions. The values, the reasons why are as important, if not more important, than the what, the goal, the action we take in making the decision.

God desires that we lift our eyes to a new level, one that shows that we act according to our beliefs. To make this a reality we have been given the Holy Spirit. The Word, the Sacraments, and one another have been given to us that our sight may be lifted and our lives blessed.

Blessings of God do not come from being right. Blessings from God come from seeking God’s will in our lives, by acting in accordance to our beliefs, and by seeing that we are one in Christ. Blessings come from those decisions that are made from values that are pure, blameless, true, honorable, just, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise.

***Think about these things!***

AMEN