

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT
March 11, 2012

God's House is a Safe House

FIRST UNITED

METHODIST CHURCH

*An Open-Spirited Community of Faith and Action
Larry Moffet, senior pastor*



The Lord is my Shepherd, I'll not want...I will fear no evil Psalm 23:1, 4

If you weren't among the 400 people here last Sunday afternoon for our Peacemaking Workshop, you missed a good time. "A good time?" you ask, "A good time talking about bridging the growing gap between rich and poor?"

Keynote speaker Jim Hightower has an fun way of using offbeat humor to get us to look at new ways of seeing the problems around us. I told him we practiced academic freedom here at First Church, so could feel right at home, say what was on his heart and know that he'd be safe.

He made the point that it is one thing to throw a little money as a band-aid at a problem, and another thing to get to the root causes, i.e., of hunger and poverty. Clutching his cowboy hat, he said, "The people in my home church, the Dennison, Texas Methodist Church, had a way of pointing out that there is a big difference between just giving a little help when we are in the mood and actually committing ourselves to make a difference."

"They told the story of a rich man who died. Of course the story has him showing up at pearly gates, with angels looking over an account of his life. 'We can't see that you ever helped anybody,' they say. 'Of course I did,' the rich man snorted. Why back in 1934 I gave a nickel to a man who didn't have a job. Then in 1944 I gave another nickel to a woman who didn't have enough food for her baby. And to show how much I believe in charity, ten years later I gave a nickel to a man who was hungry.'

"The angels turned around to St. Peter and said 'Peter what are we going to do with this fellow?' Peter replied, 'I say we give him his 15 cents back and tell him to go to hell.'" Laughter rocked our sanctuary.

The first Sunday of Lent, we saw how the covenant God made with Noah included all creation, "When you see a rainbow, you will remember the covenant I have made with you and with every living thing." With God no one and no thing are excluded. All are a part of the harmony of creation. That is the reason for "[The hope that is in us.](#)"

Last week we saw how God works through everything for good. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Even the cross, which for the Romans was an instrument of war has become a symbol of peace. By saying "**take up your cross and follow me,**" Jesus is saying "Bring along all your challenges, all your conflict, even your doubt. Just come with me and be where I am."

Today's scriptures let us hear God, through the 10 Commandments, give the Hebrew Children direction on how to live. Note how ethical rules are grounded in God's saving action:

²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³**you shall have no other gods before me.** ⁴**You shall not make for yourself an idol or any graven image.**

Today's Epistle Paul admits that the story of the cross seems to be foolishness, and reminds people that God's saving actions seem foolish too:

²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

The Gospel passage does not mean that it is okay to be angry if you know you are right. Instead, this passage tells us how important it is to keep God's House as a Safe House.

Jewish people in Jesus' day understood the temple to be the one place where human beings could encounter God. Religious leaders and others set up rules and exploitive practices to make money from the people who came to worship. People had to change their Roman money into "temple coins," because you couldn't use anything that had a graven image of Caesar to pay your Temple Tax to the priests.

It is clear that those authorized to change the currency made a handsome profit at the expense of the poor people who came to be in God's presence. So Jesus "cleanses" the temple:

Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

**¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will consume me."**

Other Gospels have Jesus quoting Isaiah (*Isaiah 56:7*):

"My God's House will be a house of prayer for all peoples."

We have different ways to keep God's House as a Safe House. We have ushers and greeters who welcome us and also keep eye on safety issues. We have hosts when groups use our building. We have clean-up crews.

We are becoming more aware of many things we need to do to make God's House a Safe House. In the past few years we have adopted "Safe Sanctuary" policies: two or more adults be with our children's classes and activities.

There are other ways God's House can become a place where some aren't safe. When you hear someone asking a question or putting someone on the spot, step in. Keep the people around you safe emotionally as well as physically.

It is not just the physical space of God's House that is Safe Space. We ourselves become safe space too. Paul said **"Our bodies are a temple of the Spirit."** *1 Cor. 6:19*

**One of the reasons I love Jesus so much is he understood
how God's house needs to be safe space for everybody.**

–He sent those who exploited others running for cover.

He scattered Those who tried to make money off of others' piety.

He went one step further. Jesus makes the Temple safe space and then says

he himself will be common ground for Divinity and Humanity:

¹⁹Jesus said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

No matter what we are facing, where God is, we are safe.

Because we are a part of the Body of Christ, we become safe space too.

**May this Holy Space always be safe space:
God's house is a safe house.**

**May all people always come here bringing our deepest longings,
our worst fears, our unspoken hopes, our deepest pain –
and be safe.**

Safety all around us gives us the space to work with the stuff of life.

May this be house of prayer for all people – Christ is host.

May all find here strength and fresh energy for our lives.

The beloved Psalm tells us that where God is we are safe, no matter what:

**Yea though I walk in the valley of the shadow...I fear no evil,
you are with me.**

A big change happens in that verse. We start to talk to God directly. Before that our prayer is about God...**The Lord is my Shepherd.** Right there at the point where we are the most vulnerable, he Psalm invites us to talk TO God: **"for you are with me..."**

"Take up your cross and follow me" for us means "Commit yourselves to making sure God's House is a Safe House. Christ's death and resurrection makes him the Temple of God's presence. Since we are part of the Body of Christ, we are a temple for the Spirit, too.

FIRST SCRIPTURE EXODUS 20:1-17

10 Commandments

Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

³you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth...

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God..

⁸Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

¹⁰But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns...

¹²**Honor your father and your mother,**
so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God
is giving you.

¹³**You shall not murder.**

¹⁴**You shall not commit adultery.**

¹⁵**You shall not steal.**

¹⁶**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

¹⁷**You shall not covet**

your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
or male or female slave, or ox or donkey,
or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those
who are perishing,

but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God
through wisdom,

God decided, through the foolishness of our preaching,
to save those who believe.

²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,

²³but we proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ is the power of God, the wisdom of God.

²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple,
both the sheep and the cattle.

He also poured out the coins of the money changers
and overturned their tables.

¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of
here!

Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us
for doing this?"

¹⁹Jesus answered them,

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction
for 46 years,

and will you raise it up in three days?"

²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body.

²²After he was raised from the dead,
his disciples remembered that he had said this;
and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

First United Methodist Church, 2723 N. 50th St. Lincoln, 68504 402 466-1906

Worship on Sundays: 8:30 & 10:45 a.m.

200 for State Confirmation Days

400 for Peacemaking Workshop

81 in Tutoring (boys whose parents came from all over the world)

144 in Theta Chi event

Over 100 for Irish Dancers

GOSPEL JOHN 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves,
and the money changers seated at their tables.