

February 10, 2008

The Irony of No

As I began to work on the sermon for this week, I was literally overcome with the irony that presented itself. Let me explain. I really don't like these times of the year and I', not talking about winter, which I love, I'm talking about election time. I hate the commercials, like the ones concerning prop 93. One says cut the term limits from 14 to 12 years, the other says it's all a ploy to get present officials an additional 6-8 years. I'm tired of hearing the phrase, "I'm Joe Blow from Idaho and I approve this ad". But what really got my goat this year and I know its' going to continue for the next ten months is all the talk about the economy and all the fixes. We've all heard it the economy is tanking, the real estate market is dead, and foreclosures are at an all time high, credit card debt delinquencies are on the rise, we need to fix the problem. The answer that all the politicians seem to be embracing is give people money to spend and lower interest rates. Now you might say well actually its a tax rebate but I have to be honest I'm not going to call it that since the proposal is to also give money to people who didn't pay taxes. How can it be a rebate if they didn't pay? I saw that Dodge is offering \$3,000.00 rebates on their trucks can I get that if I don't buy the truck? No, well I don't want to go on and on about this I want to get down to the real point and the real problem as I see it. I can sum it all up in one word, yes. Americans like that word because it goes along nicely with slogans that are thrown at us, "you deserve a break today" yes I do! "You're special treat yourself to something special" yes I will! Or the latest I heard it just this week, "make yourself happy" yes I will! We hear these things and we say yes I do deserve a break, I am special, I will make myself happy and so we say yes. I'll buy that house I can't afford, yes I'll buy that new car that is better than my neighbor's, yes I'll put it on my credit card, sure I can't pay for it but look at how many miles I've earned, yes, yes, yes. And the politicians are saying, yes, we'll give you money so you can keep saying yes and we'll cut interest rates so that you can say yes to using the card or signing that new loan.

In my humble opinion what our country needs right now is a healthy dose of Lent. Lent, the fourth season of the church year, has often been understood as a season of self-denial. Traditionally Lent was the time when new converts spent 40 days practicing self-denial as they prepared for their baptism on Easter Sunday. There were three disciplines that were followed first was fasting. How un-American saying no to food, but as you

fast you realize the blessing of food, which is a gift from God. As you fast you become hungry but it reminds us that our spirit is always hungry for Gods' word. Fasting leads to the second discipline, prayer. Instead of feeding at the kitchen table that time is now spent in prayer at the heavenly table. As we talk with God and our stomach growls we are reminded to pray for those who are less fortunate who are hungry all the time which leads to the third discipline works of love which is best described by this Lenten motto, "We should live simply so that others may simply live".

This is where the concept of giving up things for Lent comes from. The history of it goes right back to our gospel lesson of today. Jesus was baptized then took 40 days to prepare for his ministry, how? By fasting, by prayer, and by works of love. Now you may look at that and say now wait a second I see Jesus fasting, I see him praying but I don't see works of love. I understand but now think of that motto, "We should live simply". In other words deny our wants so others can simply live. Now think of what Jesus did. Satan came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread." This is a statement that challenges Jesus it challenges his human emotions of pride. Natural reaction of any human would be to say of course I'm the Son of God let me show you! How many of us would have shown an individual who challenged who we are? Satan's challenge gives Jesus an answer make bread out of stones, hit Jesus where it hurts, his belly he's hungry. What does Jesus do? He says no, he stays true to the fast. We don't really live on bread we live on the word of God that brings eternal life.

So Satan returns he knows human pride is strong, "If you are the Son of God throw yourself down", a challenge again with an answer; show your power in a public way the people will be amazed and they will embrace you, you'll be great when those angels catch you. But Jesus says no God is in control don't test Him for your own personal gain. Finally Satan shows Jesus the whorl world and says all of this I give you if you bow down and worship me. Let's lay this one on the line. Satan knows scripture he knows Isaiah speaks of the suffering servant; he knows something bad is going to happen to Jesus. What he is really saying is Jesus you deserve a break today, Jesus you're special do something for yourself, Jesus make yourself happy, just worship me and I'll give it all to you and you won't have to go through any of whatever this suffering is that you're going to have to do. Jesus said no why? He would live simply and die so that we could live and never die.

Everything American is screaming yes! How ironic everything Lent is humbly saying no. I would like to put a challenge before you, first

individually. Each person here set aside a special time each day for the next 40 days until Easter for prayer. Second, combine fasting and works of love. Give something up be simple maybe it's a cup of coffee in the morning, maybe it's a Pepsi in the afternoon but do this for the whole Lenten season. And make it a work of love take what you would have spent on that cup of coffee, on that Pepsi, on that Snickers bar whatever and put it away. On Easter bring it to church and give to the Salvation Army, which is our mission offering on Easter Sunday. And finally corporately a challenge I'd like to us for all to join together and follow an ancient church tradition in giving something up. That would be talking. This world is so chaotic and noisy for Lent let's make this house of worship a sanctuary free from the noise of the world. Upon entering church become silent sit down and think about why you're here. It's because of Lent Jesus said no to all the temptations and gave up his life for us let's focus on that. Give up our talking to each other and silently say it and contemplate what he has done and then bow our heads and silently talk to him. When Easter comes we'll break that silence and we will join together as the family of God and say He is risen!

In our Savior's name, Amen.