

" Give God The Glory "

Texts: Exodus 33:12-23

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (Series A. 21st Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 99

Matthew 22:15-22

Let us Pray –

I heard the story of a nine year old girl who returned from Sunday School and as her father was sitting down with his newspaper after a delicious Sunday lunch, she asked him some questions. "Father, why did God make all the leaves green?" He thought a moment and replied, "I don't know."

Then she asked, "What did God do before he made the world?" Again he said, "I don't know." She asked him another one: "Father, how did Noah catch the two snakes and put them in the ark?"

He put down the newspaper and said, "I don't know." The little girl sensed that her father was a bit agitated, so she asked, "Do you mind if I ask you questions?" He replied, "Not at all."

How are we going to learn anything if we don't ask questions?" Now I wish to ask a question or two and I trust we are not going to get restless. The question is: What is our church's reputation? What image pops into people's minds when they hear the name of our church St. Ansgar? What is the feed back about us? As you think about this question I want you to think about it in two ways:

- ❖ I want you to think about as it refers to this church which you worship and work within;
- and I want to think about it as it refers to you as an individual member of the body of Christ - to you as a person who believes in God.
- What is the feed back about us?
- What is the feed back about you?

Churches are like people with different personalities and gifts; some emphasize *contemporary worship*, and praise, while others emphasize *traditional liturgy*, others social ministries and yet others are known for their *musical ministry* etc.

- What is our church's reputation?
- What are we known for?

The brings us to Paul letter to the church in Thessalonica - "*We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers.* In spite of persecution, you received the Word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit... so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia... In every place your faith in God has become known."

What a great reputation!

And with that great reputation there came a great influence – an ability to move the hearts and minds of many to give praise to God and to live a more Godly life.

- Are we a people who make a difference?
- Are we the people known for our faith in the living God?

I ask this because this is our calling. In 1 Peter 2 it says: "We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light."

It is nice to be known for our annual bazaars, and open face sandwiches. It is pleasant to be known for our hospitality and warmth. It is not even so bad to be known for our beautiful organ, and sanctuary, stained glass displace. But it is far better to be known for our faith, and for what we do in faith to show our love for God and for one another.

- You are the salt of the earth, said Jesus
- You are the light of the world,
- You are a city built on a hill - which cannot be hid.

Are we known for being salty? Do our friends look at us and see in us a greater light than they see in the world? Are our lives like strong buildings - or are they just slapped together out of any old thing that comes along?

I read of a thirty story building in a large city that was built some years back. It was written up because the thirty stories building was built and completed in a matter of a few weeks. It was quite an achievement.

But when the building project manager was asked about this building marvel, he told of the many weeks it took to build the foundation. He said the taller the building, the deeper the foundation.

So, it is with the church. The foundation is Jesus Christ. When we build our lives on Christ, when we anchor ourselves by faith to the power of his word and the inspiration of his spirit then we can't help but become strong.

- even in the face of persecution, we can't help but shine
- even when it is dark, we can't help but be the salt that preserves the world
- a people who proclaim the mighty acts of God and lead others to life in him.

What is our reputation? Do we make a positive difference to the people outside these walls? Do we have a godly reputation or an ordinary one?

I'm not trying to take shots at you when I ask these questions. But I do want us all to remember what our faith is all about - and the last thing our faith is about is about being ordinary.

A godly reputation is not an ordinary thing - it is a wonderful thing - because it means that we are leading lives of joy and of love, lives of compassion and of service lives noted for their radiance and their peace, lives that are good for us and good for others.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians suggests to us what such lives are based on - it suggests to us this morning that we can have a godly reputation like those in Thessalonica if like them we practice a Godly imitation.

Apostle Paul writes: *"We know brothers and sisters, beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord..."*

God has a plan and a purpose for each one of us - but that plan and purpose is revealed to us in its fullness only when we are willing to heed his word and follow the example of Jesus and of his faithful disciples and apostles.

If we are not making a difference to others; if our reputation is nothing special; if our lives feel empty and hollow; maybe it is because we are getting too far away from the word of God

- to far away from those examples of faith and love and hope that are around us,
- to far away from the source and the inspiration of our faith.

Our Lord Jesus came to give us life and that abundantly - he came to seek *the lost and save sinners to bring good news to the poor to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.* And he shone. People wanted to be near him, to be like him. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be near him, and we can be like him and know the victory that he knew -

I want no one to feel judged today. No one to feel inadequate. This is not what the gospel is about.

- nor is it what I want for you. But I do want you to ask.
- what reputation does St. Ansgar's have in this community? And
- what reputation do we have? At home? At work? Wherever I go?

And if you are like me, I want you to ask - "What can I do to improve my reputation" "What can I do to make my church and myself more Godly, more like the living Christ I believe in – the living Christ who believes in me." Finally how can we be in mission for others in Christ Jesus? Amen.

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