*Sanctification*

Romans 6:12-23

Who in this room is holy?

Taylor has gained some experiences about the world that she may not have had if we hadn’t supported her trip. She has come back a little wiser about what is in the world. She is in the process of growing into adulthood and the more experiences she has the better equipped she will be to cope with life’s many intrigues.

In our faith we are faced with many decisions about how we want to live out that faith. We have several choices. We can choose the path of sin which leads to death. Or we can choose the path of righteousness which leads to life. We have moments when we catch a sense of holiness which leads us to want more. But faith is not all about feeling things. Faith is about consciously making a choice that we believe is acting in God’s will. It is not about knowing all the time what to do. When we come into our belief we are not fully prepared to live the life God would have us live. We are not fully prepared to live the life of Christ. Coming into the fullness of our faith, and basing all our actions and words on listening to God is a lifetime process. When we work at our faith, through prayer, studying, worshipping and paying attention to God’s leading, when we strive to live a righteous life, we grow in our faith. What we call sanctification is that process. We are working toward holiness of heart and mind.

It starts with our awareness that God is tugging at us to pay attention and learn from His wisdom. Before we come to that awareness we are marching through life without much faith direction. It’s like the video I saw this week where a puppy had fallen into a cistern and was frantically swimming around looking for a way out. Eventually, if no one intervened the puppy would wear out and die. A life lived swimming around in a cistern is what many people do. They have no spiritual direction and no promise of life beyond this earthly one. All there is to life for many is that we live and make effort to be good, but without a sense of who we truly are, we wander through life without the ultimate hope that the death and resurrection of Christ brings.

But when we become aware of what God has done in Christ, in his death and resurrection specifically, we begin to find new direction, new ways of acting, new ways of relating not only to God but to each other. We begin a process of transformation that leads us to live more righteously. This new faith cannot be just a private affair between ourselves and God. It can never be only an experience of the inner being; it must be a life in the market place. It becomes, as we grow into it, a way of life, a way of making conscious choices to live by God’s will. It is a life of responding to what we keep learning about this awesome God of ours.

William Barclay says, “God cannot work without human beings. If he wants a word spoken he has to get someone to speak it; If he wants a deed done, he has to get someone to do it. If he wants a person encouraged, someone has to do the lifting up. We learn to do those things, to listen to God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Sin has a tremendous capacity to lead us into a life not fitting who we are. Sin can produce more sin. The first time we do a sin we may do it with hesitation, a brief sense of guilt. But the next time it becomes easier to ignore the sense of “wrongness” we get. Before we know it sin gets out of hand and we are headed down a path that is hard to recover from.

But as we grow in Christian faith, we begin more and more to give God his due place and grow to respect the rights of others. When we begin to live the life of faith, we begin to make better choices about how we will act in life. It isn’t necessarily all about the stage we are at in our faith, but more about the direction we are traveling. Several years ago I read an article about the “stages” of faith. While the article was interesting and I pondered what stage I might be in, I realized that sometimes faith cannot be put in stages. We move forward, then slip back, are picked up again and set on our feet. Faith is fluid. In this life faith is never finished, but always in the process of becoming complete. So when we seem to fall, seem to not get things quite right, God will be right there picking us up and setting us back on course. We can know we are going to mess up at times, but that is what we learn from and how our faith grows. By letting God pick us up and set us on course we become stronger.

“Going on to perfection” as John Wesley, founder of our faith, is continually being open to God and new ways of doing life. It’s a matter of continuous growing and changing. So if we think our faith is finished, think again. New experiences bombard our lives, some easy, some tough and God directs us into holier living. We are becoming holy people of God. We are being sanctified even as we listen and respond this hour, this day, this week, month and year.

So I ask you again, “Who in this room is holy?” If we are seeking to be better Christians, then I would challenge us to answer that question in the affirmative.