

Scripture: Matthew 5.38-48
Date: February 20, 2011
Service: 7 Epiphany
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palatka, FL
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

If you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?

One thing, which happens regularly during parish dinners and other functions, really makes me upset.

Can anyone tell me what it is?

I really dislike seeing anyone, especially new people or the least popular people, sitting alone for dinner, standing alone, or someone sitting in a pew trying to figure out what to do. This is upsetting because we are supposed to be a community of Christians who love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

And whenever I suggest someone should go over and be with a new or alone couple, family, or person, can you guess what the typical response is?

I haven't seen my friends and I want to be with them.

Well, it's good that you want to be with your friends and your friends want to be with you; however, the person or family who comes to dinner, who comes to church, who comes to breakfast, who comes to the special service or event is searching for something or someone. They might be searching for God, a friend, or community which lives out this saying, "Welcome. Come. Be our guest and make yourself one of the family." To live out and mean that statement to someone you do not know is true Christianity and is your ministry. If you do anything less than welcoming and being with someone or a family who is new or alone is, dare I say it, sinful.

The New Century Version of today's key verse is, "If you are nice only to your friends, you are no better than other people. Even those who don't know God are nice to their friends."

Christianity is accepting and following Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and it is a way of life that transforms our lives so we may share our Christ transformed life with someone else by loving your neighbor as yourself.

Saying, "I am a Christian" is easy most of the time; however, living the life of a Christian isn't leisurely drifting along, it requires effort and sometimes work that is hard, uncomfortable, and may not be what we want to do, which is why many Christians opt out of Jesus' rules of Christian living and why many non-Christians rightly feel and know the church is full of hypocrites.

D.A. Carson, New Testament scholar and research professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School wrote, "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."

When we drifting along in life as well as in our faith, we don't get anywhere fast and unless we know where the current is taking us, we will end up somewhere we did not want to be, which is why Jesus is concerned with our behavior as His children from the day we said, "Yes Lord, I believe!"

As the year moves forward, we must not relax and drift along in our faith. We must put our faith into action by befriending and loving those who are not our friends and those whom we do not love.

To stop drifting along and thrive instead of survive, let us do more than the bare minimum and richly participate in Lent this year, which begins on March 9th with Ash Wednesday.

Lent is important because it is the time of the year the Christian Church sets aside for us to deliberately take a very close look at our lives, at our relationships, and at our faith. It is a time where we fast by giving up a portion of our world that is keeping us from a full relationship with Jesus Christ and keeps us from loving our neighbors, the ones we do not know, the way Christ commands us to. And so I ask again, "Are you ready to put your faith into action or do you just want to let it drift away?" Your actions, not your words, will answer that question. So what are you going to do to answer the question?

Your answer is expected Easter Sunday because you are called to do more than an ordinary good person.