

### Our Actions as Christians Are Constrained by Effects on Others

We might think that what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about eating meat that had been offered to idols would "have absolutely no relevance whatsoever for us," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his Epiphany 4 sermon on February 1.

When we examine what Paul said, however, "we discover that what Paul says to them is extremely relevant for us, and includes some of the most practical advice we could ever hear."

"The problem," Pastor Thelander said, "is that everyone is not at the same place spiritually." In such a circumstance, "there is a greater principle at work" than just our freedom. "The issue here, says Paul, is that our actions as Christians are not based merely on what we know, but on our concern for other Christians, and the influence our actions will have on them. Our freedom in Christ is real, but it is not absolute. It is not a freedom to do anything we please without regard for consequences. It is a freedom to serve: freedom to serve Christ and others. And if, in doing something that may be entirely right and proper, we make another Christian stumble, we are sinning against God and our fellow believer."

Paul discovered that what we want is "not as important as what someone else needs."

### Remember Our Calling and Identity, Not Victimized by Our Own Success

After Jesus healed many people at Capernaum, he retreated into the wilderness to be alone and to pray," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander noted in his sermon last Sunday.

"I don't believe," Pastor Thelander said, that Jesus was merely seeking to "re-charge his spiritual batteries." "I believe something deeper may be at work, something that began at Jesus' baptism, when the voice from heaven said, 'You are my beloved Son.'"

The word "wilderness" has a long history in the Scriptures, meaning "not just a place of solitude, not simply a neutral place to be alone and to be quiet, but a place of great testing, a place of great struggle and spiritual warfare."

Pastor Thelander said Jesus may be "being tested and tempted to abandon what was spoken to him at his baptism. . . . I can imagine Satan coming to Jesus and saying, 'Hey, Jesus, why don't you just stay here in Capernaum? You don't need to move on down the road to Jerusalem. Just stay here where the crowds are clamoring for you.' I think that what may be happening here is that Jesus is being tempted to bypass his true mission and calling. . . . It may be that Jesus is trying to prevent a distorted understanding of his true identity from becoming his 'true' identity. . . . (I)t may be that he is



being tempted to become a victim of his own success, to let (p. 2→)

"Honor et Virtus post mortem floret", also known as "Hercules between Virtue and Vice", Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), Frick Collection, New York. © Web Gallery of Art. Portraying the fruitless attempt by Vice to win over the man of honor, the work can be seen as relating, also, to this Sunday's Epistle lesson, in which we will hear, "All athletes practice self-control. . . . So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. . . . I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should."

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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

**For the poor:** Ground beef; chicken; bacon; fresh produce (particular need now); canned fruits and vegetables; milk; cutter; cheese; cooking oil; pancake mix and syrup; dry cereal; chili powder; garlic powder; diapers and baby wipes; toilet paper; soap; shampoo and conditioner; razors; shaving cream; men's, women's and children's underwear; cleaning supplies and bleach.

**Readings, 2/15:** 2 Kings 5:1-15; Ps. 42:1-7; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Mark 1:40-45.

**2/22:** Ex. 34:28-35; Ps. 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Mark 9:2-10. **Ash Wed.:** Joel 2:1-17; Ps. 103:8 *et seq.*; 2 Cor. 5:20—6:10; Mt. 6:1-6, 16-21; Ps. 51.

**Prayer Emphases:** Zambia; Assemblies of God; Fergus Falls Church of the Nazarene, Fergus Falls, MN, and the Rev. Steve Hoffman; Evangelicals for Social Justice; parishioners on Larch Street.

(**Sermon, cont'd.**) part of who he is become his whole identity, to let his success in Capernaum prevent him from moving on to other villages, and eventually to Jerusalem." God strengthened Jesus, however, and Jesus then told his disciples that it was time to move on. "I believe that the same Spirit that strengthened Jesus to stay true to who he was is also at work in this congregation, and in our lives. The Spirit is at work among us, helping us to remain faithful to our calling to be a church in the Wesleyan tradition that worships according to the ancient pattern of Word and Table. . . . And the Spirit is also at work in each of you, reminding you who you are . . . where you may be tempted to take shortcuts or to lay aside God's will for your life."