**Walking in the Spirit (2-12-17)**

Dt. 30:15-20 1 Cor. 3:2-9 Matthew 5: 21-37

**Summary:** It is not that worship should become our life but that our life must become our worship.

One of the most prevalent trends in most religions is piety, the tendency to introduce acts of worship into daily living. From my summary, you might think I am critical of this, but it is a healthy practice and includes such activities as grace before meals, personal or family prayer and Bible study, and bedtime prayers. We will see piety in our Catholic brothers and sisters as ashes adorn many foreheads on March 1st and fish becomes the entre on Lenten Fridays.

And, I love that Ash Wednesday ash tradition. Do you know where the ashes come from? The leftover palms from Palm Sunday are burned to make Lenten ashes; it is great symbolism and a very appropriate form of piety.

As for myself, watch my earrings! I often wear a pair with some kind of religious significance (often obscure) on Sundays. For example this pair is copied from a prehistoric cave painting and always reminds me of how the women must have felt on Easter Sunday. Also, I have an entire month-long, daily earring extravaganza in December as we approach Christmas .In addition, it is not unusual to hear me let out with the occasional, ”Praise the Lord,” and I have even spontaneously sung a hymn or chorus as part of a conversation.

So, far from being in opposition to piety, I encourage it, but I’d like to see it mature. Paul told the Corinthians (3:2) that he fed them “milk of the Spirit” knowing that they were like infants in the Gospel and not ready for a meat course yet. It is like that with piety: we can begin expressing faith in our dress and customs, but we must mature into having our lives express the substance of our faith.

Deuteronomy confesses that the law, all that was known of God’s love and salvation, has set before us life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life! That choice informs how people live; so it is no shock to see unique forms of Jewish dress and behavior. Soon, however, God is complaining through the prophets that piety was too superficial.

Paul depended on no letters of reference from Corinth since the changes in the spirit of the people in his church gave testimony to his effectiveness in evangelism. And, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out a lifestyle that clearly exceeds even the most perfect of the Pharisees!

The Pharisees do not murder? Among God’s people, anger itself veers away from God, not to mention handing out insults or making others feel inferior and saying, “You fool!” Let me tell you: Mr. T is in big trouble here – and so am I!

If you are on your way to Communion when you should be on your way to reconcile with your brother or sister in Christ, it is faithful living that must come first. Living is our truest act of worship, without which all our rituals are false, hollow, and ineffective.

God is not pleased with thousands of sacrificial rams and bulls, 10,000 rivers of sacred oil, a lifetime of “Praise the Lords,” double tithes, perfect church attendance, and lives which avoid all violations of the big 10 Commandments. None of that can save us because only one life can and has been offered universally for us.

Now that we have claimed that one life as our Lord, we need no mother’s milk of piety. Only let us do justice, love kindness, and live with God in humility. Only let our lives be our worship and our worship the meat and substance of our lives! Amen!