

*Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I have a shameful confession to make. **I did not know how to properly tie my shoes until I was in the third grade.**

I'm sure that my parents and kindergarten teacher had tried to teach me how to tie my shoes with a slip bow knot, but no matter what the reason, somehow all the lessons on that elusive slip bow knot never made it from my ears to my hands; *so I learned to tie it my own way.* I learned to tie *a convincing replica of the slip bow knot.* My knot had **two bows**, and **two strings**, *but pulling the loose strings did nothing but make the knot tighter.* It was for lack of a better description a **square knot tied with two loops of shoe string.** For a couple of years, *I believed or at least tried to convince myself that my way was superior to the slip bow knot.*

In the third grade *Lea Smith set me straight.* She saw me tying my shoes one day, and **asked why I did it that way.** Long story, short, *she demonstrated unequivocally why mine was an inferior knot, and then did this amazing bunny around the tree thing, which suddenly made it all make sense.* From then on I was a slip bow knot man; though I still tied my double loop square knots for kickball; they never came undone.

*Sometimes, all the explaining in the world will not instill the intended idea or purpose.* Sometimes, all the teaching in the world will not convey the desired lesson. In these cases, *a proper demonstration by some-one who cares enough to take the time can teach us what we need to know.*

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings are a perfect example of this principle this morning. Isaiah's words this morning – spoken to the

discouraged pilgrims who have returned after 70 years to a devastated Jerusalem – speak the encouragement of God’s kingdom to the righteousness.

*“If you live God’s love made known in the law with your hearts – loving your neighbor and especially the weak and lowly among you – you will be blessed, and God will guide you to a new day of restoration and the rebirth of your city. If you remove exploitation of one over another; if you stop judging one another – anyone; if you refrain from gossiping and speaking evil of any your neighbor; if you feed the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted and let the forgotten know they are not forgotten – then:*

*then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

*Isaiah remind the people returning from the 70 years of misery and captivity caused by their failure to live the love implicit in the law, that just as there is a curse that accompanies failing to live out God’s Kingdom, blessing is implicit and bountiful for the people and society that embody God’s mercy and love towards all people.*

But clearly, *the prophet’s words fall on deaf ears. Because the very law which exists to express and demonstrate God’s love for all and God’s expectation of justice for all **gradually became codified and institutionalized** until it and the establishment built up around it **become more important than the children** of God for whom it exists to give hope and proclaim freedom. **They were words that fail to teach, encouragement and hope that become narrowed to apply only to the people who hear them rather than all the people for whom they were intended.***

This is *exactly what Jesus faces this morning* as he offers hope and liberation to the afflicted woman bent over by the spirit that crippled her for 18 years. *Indignant that a person in need of God's mercy would dare receive that mercy on the Sabbath, the leader of the synagogue condemns her and all others who would receive God's mercy on God's special day* – which by the way she clearly did not seek out. Jesus addresses the irony and hypocrisy of the situation head on:

*You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? <sup>16</sup>And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?*

***Jesus champions the dignity of God's child over the perception of correctness or institutional correctness. For God's law and people exist only for one purpose, to proclaim the Father's favor to all God's people. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians:***

*“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).*

***This is the dilemma Christianity faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*** – especially we in mainline Christianity. ***Will we place doing God's will and proclaiming the gospel*** – sharing with the world the good news that God's love embraces all people – ***over the preservation of our institutions?*** Will we mobilize ourselves to make the Father's love – Jesus' love – known to all people, beginning with the most afflicted, ***or will we mobilize simply to***

*preserve our congregation?* Will we ***put our individual and personal discomfort aside to serve*** and proudly bear Jesus' name to the world, ***or will we fade into oblivion as yet another group of people who paid tribute to the idea of God's love for US.***

***Will we passively devote ourselves to preserving congregation, denomination, liberality, conservatism, morality, the family, marriage, music, liturgy, correct theology, the infallibility of the Bible, patriarchy, prosperity, saving souls – or will we make the Father's love known to all we meet in Jesus' name, giving hope to the hopeless, bread to the hungry, a new beginning to those with no future?***

I commend to you this day, that we will know the difference when the dignity of people scorned and rejected by the correct of the world have their dignity restored – just as Jesus' raised up a sick, afflicted, outcast woman, and called her once again “*a daughter of Abraham.*”

In the end Jesus reminds us this morning ***that there is a difference between preserving the appearance of the Kingdom of God and spreading the power and mercy of the Kingdom of God.***

It's just like that knot I devised to tie my shoes as a kid. It looked like the real thing, but it no longer really served the purpose or function of the real knot. My double loop square knot bound shoes to the feet, but didn't allow for the liberation or release of the knot and shoe. The choice is ours, but long story, short, Jesus has demonstrated unequivocally why the preservation of our ways are inferior – like my knot. But the real thing – God's merciful love and justice – like the Fiegggen bow knot, unbinds and sets free with a single, gentle pull. ***AMEN !!!***