

Sermon by Rev. Jim Anderson on 5/21/17, Christ Church Federated, Kennebunk

Please join me in an attitude of prayer:

Holy One, may your Spirit be with me this morning, helping my words to be your words and my thoughts be thoughts of you. And Lord may all of us receive these words in ways that bring us closer to the Jesus that lives in us. We ask this in the name of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen

How many of you like tests? I think, for most of us the idea of tests involves something medical. I never want again hear a seemingly nice lady holding a needle the size of a fire hose tell me that "this is going to pinch a little bit."

Most of us, there are some really nice nurses here, are tired of hearing someone read off a string of numbers, without telling us the unit of measurement or the normal values, as if we had some idea of what that number means.

A few years ago, I was preaching at First Congregational Church in the port and almost passed out. I didn't interpret it as a vision from God and after the service went up to the ER in Biddeford. After the normal sticks, pokes, and questions a nurse came into the room with a very serious expression on her face and asked me "Do you know your blood count is 750?" This meant nothing to me and I replied "No, but if you hum a few bars I will try to pick it up." She did not think that this was a time for humor so after that I shut up and listened.

I hope you noticed the Honor Roll report from Kennebunk High School in last week's paper. Not because both my granddaughters were on the High Honors list, but because of all the hard work and test taking that the report represents. I know from comments at home of the preparations being made for final exams in a month. Those kids learn a great deal and their teachers know that testing is a way to drive home the lessons. You can expect what you inspect.

A few minutes ago when we read Psalm 66, I read "For You, O God, have tested us." What I was reading from is a song of thanksgiving, thanksgiving to our Maker of leading us into situations which make us stronger, better people. That line went on to "you have tried us as silver is tried." Remember that silver is tried by heating it past the melting point. That makes the needle pinch seem not so bad after all. It puts the last six or seven years of trials that our congregation has experienced seem not so bad. Remember, silver is tried to remove impurities. After the melting it is more beautiful and valuable.

We hear Jesus in this morning's lesson from the Gospel of John not promising that if we love Him we will not be tested. We hear Him promising that God who He calls "Father" will send us the Holy Spirit, "The Spirit of Truth." Jesus promises that we will not go through testing alone. God will always be with us. Jesus will be with us and the Holy

Spirit will be with us giving us strength and wisdom. The last time we went through the rebuilding process we learned to our relief that God's church was with us and we are continuing to see that presence today. We have already received counseling from the Committee on Ministry of the York Association and the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ. We also have United Methodist Church to draw upon.

We are not facing this alone.

Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Those commandments are about love, loving God and loving our neighbors. Both are heartfelt actions. Loving God leads us to join in worshipping God, reading our owner's manual, the Bible, and regularly talking to God (I mean praying, telling God of our hopes and fears, our gratitude and needs.) Loving our neighbors leads us to help them any way we can. It includes welcoming newcomers and sharing what we have. It includes rejecting and resisting talk of isolation and fear of the unknown.

Jesus told us to love others as he loved us and then gave up his life for us. As we leave worship this morning I hope you will take with you the assurance that you do not leave alone. God leaves with you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Talk to God regularly. As you are welcome in this place and bring us happiness by your presence, your prayers are invited and welcomed by God.