

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

November 10, 2013

Sermon: Rev. Stephen Wendeldt

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit Amen

Please be seated. And can I ask ya'll to come on down please? I've just been doing this so long it is really hard when people I tried to preach to are those people behind you. And when you have acolytes up there, you never know what they are doing. So I just watched, always watch the faces of people and when they go "oooooh," then you know they're doing something kind of untoward but have you ever tried to speak at the people behind you? Oh man, how unkind is that? You know I mean they just see the most special side of you. So thank you very much, thank you for appeasing me. See I'm just screwing everything up right away, I'm the new guy. My name is Steve Wendelt, I'm happy as a clam to be here. I've been with you many times before over the years but you haven't seen me for awhile because I am now retired and live halftime in Montana and half time here. I have a wonderful little church that I work at up there and a number of churches down here where I work and it is still my joy that I work in the Lord's business.

I was at a restaurant not very long ago and I ordered a cheeseburger, you like those don't you? I ordered cheese burger I ask for it to be somewhere between rare and medium rare. The waiter just looked at me in stunned silence. He said "I won't do that. Don't you know that will kill you? And that besides it's against our rules." I said "What the heck is going on here? I mean are we living with restaurant rules now?" I like my meat rare to medium rare hamburgers included. I eat steak tartare. Don't you hate it when somebody else somewhere else makes some kind of stupid rule about what you can eat and what you can't? Somebody thinks they know what's better for you than what you know yourself? I mean, how do you feel? Same way? It used to be there was five food groups, for those of you old enough to remember that little funny pyramid. You were suppose to have all of them, nowadays just about every other week that some research project that comes on saying this will cause cancer, heck we can't eat that stuff anymore. You used to be called to eat starches and breads. Heck, now a days carbs will kill you. It's that Gluten, it lies just like a lump in your belly you can't digest anything. It will just stop you all up. It's the center of all our problems. Or protein, red meat, eggs, butter. Have you ever cooked eggs in olive oil? Oh yuck. I mean come on, this stuff clogs our arteries, it will kill us they say. And now fish has too much

mercury. Come on! Give me a break. It's a wonder that the human race has survived until today. One of the new rules that I do like is that glass of red wine every day. That is a good one don't you think? It seems to fit any ill, anything that is going on. It's wonderful but you know it's gotten so bad that nowadays there is a multi billion dollar industry that makes supplements and additives to give us all those nutrients that we can't get in the food that we can eat. So it's to keep us healthy, holy mackerel. All that aside for a moment... too much is the holy mackerel. But it reminds me of a guy in my congregation. I've worked in the very first Kyros, if you ever know of the Kyros Ministry. I worked in the very first Kyros in the United States, it was down in Florida, and I've worked in Kyros on and off for forty some years but we had a guy up in Washington who was a Kyros graduate as it were, finally got out of prison and he started going to our church. He is this wonderful fellow, just wonderful, and when you would bring the bread along to put in his hand, you go along with the body of Christ the bread of heaven, and most people will go "huh" and "uh" and you say come on say something, like Amen! Well this guy, he would come along and you would put the bread in his hand and he would go WOW! Now that is a pretty good response don't you think? WOW! And he meant it. This is the body of Christ, WOW, in my hand? You know isn't that good? You know I don't like all these new food rules. I liked them the way they used to be. I took my own chances you know?

Technology was kind of the same way. Remember back when we first got cell phones? That was a hard enough change. But I remember I got a message from a friend of mine, a phone message from a friend of mine saying that he was too busy to talk to me so could I text him. Huh? Like on my phone? I had no idea, I didn't know how to speed dial. You know, I couldn't do any of that stuff. Geewiz. It was just so new to me and I resisted. It used to be that people had conversations and I like it that way. I think it's better that way. I enjoy life that way. I now text because I have 20 grand children and that seems to be the only way to communicate with me. But I like it the old way, I am comfortable with the way I have always done it. I don't like change. In the last 40 or 50 years, our society has a whole lot of things just dumped on us.

A variety of change of standards, and rationalizations, and a whole lot of stuff that we've had kind of had to deal with. The rules are changing. Some are innocuous, some are not, some are not a problem, some are terrible problems. For example do you remember when we made a decision in this country, a long time ago, to join the rest of the world in its weights and measures system? Like when we were suppose to be on the metric system by like nineteen eighty. Boy did we push back on that dude? Right, people like me who can't even...I can't convert ounces the cups let alone deal with kilos and meters and liters. We humans critters are resistant to change aren't we? We are really resistant to change because our ties to our standards, and to our convictions, and to what we believe to be true and best are so great that a vision of the new, which calls us to have to change our hearts or our minds or anything else, is

something we don't like. Right? C'mon people are you here? Thank you sir. Significant change is painful, whether it's an external kind of change like our new communications systems, or what's even much much harder is those things that are internal and have visceral consequences on us. Those things that cause us to have to look at our morals our values and our faith. Imagine then, what it must have been like for the people of ancient Israel when this new, rather crazy itinerant preacher, comes onto the scene and turned standard Judaism on its ear. Imagine that. He's saying things to them like love those enemies that you have. And He says you have heard it said, hate your enemies but I say to you love your enemy. I say to you walk that extra mile, literally walk that. I say to you turn that other cheek and never attack. I say to you take off not only your cloak but your shirt and give it to the one in need. Pretty hard stuff don't you think?

Today's lesson is the case in point. Today the Sadducees, a group of Sadducees come to Jesus. Now the Sadducees were over and against the Pharisees. We have just read a scene where the Pharisees had sent spies to Jesus and asked him about paying taxes to Caesar, to see if they can trap him. And they failed on that one, I mean they always failed. So now another set of Sadducees come to him, the Sadducees are the strict adherence to law. They are the literalists, they are the ones who know the law. Every jot and tittle and are a group of people that do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The reason they don't is because their narrow view of the word of God is so narrow that if it's not in the law it must not be true. So because the resurrection of the dead is never mentioned in the law there could be no resurrection of the dead. So they come to Jesus, again trying to ensnare him as always, they wanna see if he will not only support the liberal definition of Scripture but also cast aside the doctrine of resurrection. And they come to him with it this absurd question. They speak to him about the Doctrine of Levirate Marriage, which is from Deuteronomy chapter twenty five. That is if a guy marries a woman then he dies without child then the brother has come and do that so forth. Don't you love that one? Wouldn't you just love to be in that situation? Oh yes, ladies? How about it? So they give him this absurd situation of seven brothers who all married the same girl, they all die then she dies. And then they have this absurd question of whose husband will she be in the resurrection? Knowing that he, of course, could never answer that question. He said to them this, "The way of the world is not God's way. The things of the world aren't God's things. The institutions of the world for God are null and void in the Kingdom. In Resurrection life none that exists because that has been the abolished and all the institutions you have created are no more. The only thing there is is being a child of God. And being a child of the resurrection and all that other stuff that one can cast aside." Well these Sadducees can not deal with that. They have no idea what to do with that and they just go "excuse me. you have answered wisely." They bow and back away and the text says that they are afraid to ask him any other questions.

Time and again in Scripture, in the Gospels, the rule setters come to Jesus asking him to support the way they do things. Support what is that they believe and every single time what does he say? No. No. God's ways are not the world's way. God's ways are not your ways. How often is it that we come to God trying to convince him that our way is right? That what we have done is really ok isn't it God? That you're really on my side aren't you God? And what does God say in every case? No. My ways are not your ways. Your ways can be my way but my ways are never your ways. How many of us have arrived in the Kingdom? So we all got some work to do don't we? You see being a child of God is easy but acting like one is really hard work. We're called to act like children, we're like called to act like transformed individuals, people whose lives have been changed by the power of God Almighty. Right? God was calling the people of Israel to do that and we're not all are different. Are we really? God wants us to live under his rules, under his domain, under his way, under his command, under his grace, under his prophecy, under his world, under his word. Right? That's what he wants and we're gone oooo that is so hard! I will just not today, any other changes, just not today. I got stuff to do. We just push back against that, and God says look what I have for you. A sure sign of that is why is it that God wants our lives to change? Well because God loves us of course. But he wants our lives to change so that we, as transformed people who show forth God's grace, might bring that grace to whom...them! So that they would see us and they would come flying in our doors. And the church would just be filled! How are we doing on that one? Is that God's problem? No. Because we are not looking like that transform people. We still want to live under our rules, very much like the Jews, we don't like to change. We want to set the rules and have God be made in our own image. And God' says, no. You want to be a child of God? Hello? You want to be a child of God? You want that new life for yourself? You want to be living in that resurrected life from today on? Ya we can do that, today. We can do that now. We can do that in this place. In St. Andrews. In La Mesa. Right here right now. If you want that kind of life, if you come to this alter today. That same alter, that same place that you have been coming to all these years, it hasn't changed much. But I want you, when you come to that alter, to be that changed one. When you come the alter, I would ask you... if you would like...if you are changed enough...if you are ready, to offer your life a new to the Lord Jesus Christ. To offer yourself as an instrument of his grace. To call on the Lord, to pour upon you a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. To fill your life in a way it has not been filled before. To say yes to that in filling of God's grace and to become a child of God to which he calls you today in this place now. Amen.