

2 Kings 5:1-3,7-15c

Luke 17:11-19

2 Timothy 2:8-15

“The work of God’s hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.” AMEN!

“All of God’s precepts are trustworthy.”

I had to look it up and refresh my memory
on what the word “precept” means.

No shame, it’s not a word we use very often. :-)

A precept is a general rule intended
to regulate behavior and thought.

A precept is issued from one of authority to a subordinate.

The precept at the Holdcraft house was
that our children could not cross the street
by themselves until the time came

when we were certain they knew
how to look left, right, and then left.

Once they knew how traffic worked, and
how to use crosswalks, and showed us
they knew the safest ways,

we let them cross the street by themselves.

It was for their own good and the rules came

from the ones with authority to the ones
who were subordinate.

The psalmist therefore teaches us God's rules,
that regulate behavior and thought,
come to human beings for our own good
and for livelihood.

Notice that it comes to all human beings, and
all human beings are to practice the precepts
from God. (Pause)

Everyone's heard the phrase,
"Practice makes perfect."

Most may not realize that the old adage
can go both ways.

If one practices bad behavior,
unhealthy behavior, selfish behavior then
a certain amount of time will pass and

that one will come to perfect that bad, unhealthy,
and selfish behavior,

but when one practices the behavior of gratitude,
healthy behavior, and generosity then over time
these positive characteristics become
more and more perfect in us.

Maturity might tell us that while early in

the practicing of these positive traits,
we follow the sense of duty. (Pause)

Duty and obligation are good traits, but my prayer is
we do things, and give things, out of love. (Pause)

I heard a story at the pastor's conference
I attended a couple weeks ago that illustrates
this point well.

At 10 years old, Mark was asked by his mother
to go to the florist in town and pick up a
vase of flowers each week.

His mother loved to have fresh flowers
from the florist in the home and when

Mark was old enough it became his duty each week
to walk to the florist to pick them up and
walk home carrying the vase of flowers.

Maybe not a big deal to us,
but, in the mind of a ten year old boy this
was a dreaded task.

Dreaded because someone might actually
see him carrying flowers.

"Hey, flower boy! Ooh, Mark's a pretty boy
with his flowers."

You know how kids can be and you may know
what it feels like to be singled out and bullied.

It made total sense in Mark's mind that
he was an easy target for someone
to mock him while he carried the flowers home.

He didn't like the task but it was his duty and he did it.

Then, 10 years later on the same street,
in the same town, Mark went to the same florist
to buy a vase of flowers.

This time on his own and for his own reason.

He wanted to take them to the girl
he'd fallen in love with and ask to marry her.

Nothing else ran through his mind except
how happy she will be when he gives them to her
and how fortunate he was to bring
her the vase of flowers. (Pause)

So, what's changed?

There's still duty within the behavior,
but the part that's changed is that the gift
was given out of love and the caring about
the negative things other people
thought vanished.

I believe that's what makes the one that
returned, special in Jesus' eyes.

Even though, in every sense the man
disobeyed Jesus when he didn't go
present himself to the priests.

Instead, upon the realization that he was healed,
he turned back and went directly to Jesus
and praised God with a loud voice.

We don't know if later he went to the priests,
but suddenly that duty didn't matter anymore.

What did matter was how fortunate he felt and
he wanted to show Jesus how much he loved God.
(Pause)

Beloved, this is why one of the high points of our worship
together is the time during offering.

We might have done it out of duty
for a short or long time, and I'm thankful for that,
but my prayer is that we move from
the sense of duty to an offering of love.

To recognize what we have of value
and then be able to give some of it away
freely and joyfully.

The gifts are not meant to feed the pastor,

or even the poor, but as an act of worship and
praise for the God that's given us so much.

In this we become transformed and more joyful people,
returning to the feet of Jesus and praising God
with a loud voice.

AMEN!