

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
October 19, 2008
By: Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture: Exodus 33: 12-23 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Sermon Title: "Being Seen, Being Known"

(open with prayer)

It is fitting on the Peace with Justice that we are given these scriptures to search our hearts and examine our faith. The letter from Paul to the Thessalonians is believed by many scholars to be the earliest written work in our Christian scriptures. This letter of hope and encouragement takes on three basic themes for that early church. All of them have to do with who we are today here in the pews at Robbinsdale United Church of Christ.

The first is that **evangelism** has ancient roots. The early church is meant to spread and grow and be alive. As we begin our new member classes today, it is a clear focus for our congregation as well. It is however to point out what evangelism means, for it is often a scary word associated with consuming people and cultures. One of my favorite authors has been Paulo Freire, author of "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." He writes about early evangelists from the US in Central America. He describes them as having a "banking system" mentality. They go to another culture and "deposit" some information in the culture and then they return to collect on their information. For Freire, this was antithetical to the gospel. This system had nothing to do with following Christ, encouraging your neighbor or bringing about the realm of God. What Freire really championed was the building up of community and relationship as a means to connect with God, but also to provide the people a lasting sense of security and wealth. Evangelism was about "knowing" and "being". It is about mutuality and the sharing of power.

An honest critique of our banking system is present in this work. I did not start this sermon expecting to find this connection, but a corrupt banking system that doesn't hold anyone responsible or accountable is a failed way of providing safety and security. Our investments according to Freire and the Apostle Paul need to be in people. Our investments need to be in the sharing of knowledge and the practice of seeing ourselves and others as God sees us. Evangelism may indeed be the way to fix our economic crisis. Not evangelism that seeks to give handouts, but the kind that forges relationship and accountability. We need to be about sharing and letting go. We need to be released from our fear and live out of the abundance that God has given our world. Even with a market down 36%

from just three weeks ago, we still have more than enough. Evangelism for this early church is all about the recognition that I and my neighbor are both children of God. The financial meltdown will not be lifted by any democrat or any republican it will be lifted up by the people who make trade in the system of banking for the system of living in the peace of God.

The second theme here in this earliest of all letters is about peace. Our connection to peace with justice Sunday lies in a simple Hebrew word called **Shalom**. We all know that words means "Peace", and we may also know that the Hebrew meaning of the word means, "Justice". It often also called, "God's Time" or "God's place". We know Shalom when we know God, or we God knows us when we live Shalom. It is, however, important to point out that this word is translated to the latin word for peace early in the life of bible translations. The word is "pax" and often gets used in conjunction with the word Shalom. The problem is that there is a cultural disconnect between pax and Shalom. Shalom is about people living in harmony, it is about people living with God and God with them. There are no worries and fears in Shalom living, because everyone is provided for. If there is poverty in our neighborhood there is no Shalom. Shalom is about equity and justice and living for others. Pax is about safety from our enemies or victory in our war. It is a very different understanding. War may leave people impoverished, scared and alone, and there are some that could call that peace, but we could never call that Shalom. Shalom heals, lifts up and takes us to a new place of loving and being loved. For those early Christians, Paul guides them with images of Shalom.

The third them that is hidden in this passage is about "**ekklesia**" – the Greek word for church. Before there was anything called Christianity, Paul described what it means to be church. In this greeting he lifts up the people with images of grace and peace. When they gather they gather cloaked in the images of grace and peace, forgiveness and shalom. The church is built on the idea that we must always seek reconciliation and that we must always strive for justice. These are the cornerstones of our faith from the very beginning of time. When Moses pleaded with God for the people called Israel, God heard the request and promised that mercy and peace would always be with that people. The world would know them because they lived surrounded by mercy and peace. It would be their calling card. Sometimes, the people forgot that they were a gift of God to the world. Paul is reminding these Gentiles that they are also a part of that gift, and I stand here today to remind you as well that you are that gift. When God looks at you, God sees a child clothed in grace and peace.

AMEN.