

What's My Line (part 2) -- Ephesians 4:25-5:2
 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 11th Sunday after Pentecost (August 12) 2012

4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. **26** Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil. **28** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

5: 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Today's scripture talks about loopholes in God's Kingdom, through which evil can grab you so easily into a downward spiral: (a) **lying**, (b) **inappropriate anger**, (c) **greed** (d) **loose lips**, (e) **stinginess of spirit**.

What are others of which you are aware?

Paul is telling the Church in Ephesus that there are lots of ways by which Christians – by which ANYone – can be distracted from the thing they need, and even want.

The original definition of the word SIN, I have read, was an ARCHERY TERM, and means “missing the mark.” These five are just examples. There are many others.

Which sin do you want preached about – yours or somebody else's? I've concluded there is a division of the house here. Some people would always rather hear other people's sins preached about, so they can feel better about themselves – “Well, at least I don't do this and I don't do that.”

However, some people usually think that the preacher is thinking about them in person whenever a sin is mentioned from the pulpit...”How did he know that I ...?”

Some preachers and some people in the pew feel like **it's not church unless somebody's sins are being lifted up and exposed.**

But another way of dealing with the same BASIC ISSUE Paul is addressing is looking NOT AT THE NEGATIVES – “DON'T DO THIS, DON'T DO THAT” – but, instead, FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE – WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. “How do we stay on track?”

I got an email from one national preacher this week who said **“If you are experiencing an EMPTINESS that rarely goes away or an AIMLESS MEANDERING in your life, these are indicators that you are [‘out of line’] in pursuing God’s purpose in your life.”**

“Out of Line”?

What kinds of lines are in your life?

- a. Ques
 - b. Life Lines
 - c. Color within the Lines
 - d. Toe the Line
 - e. Line of Work / Occupation (like last week’s sermon experience – the old game show “What’s My Line?”)
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Let me talk about a different kind of line:

There is a piece of equipment used on farms in the Great Northern Plains. It’s called a **SNOW LINE**. It’s not fancy, nor expensive. But it is LIFE SAVING.

A **SNOW LINE** is simply a piece of rope tied on one end to the house and on the other end to the barn.

They have snow and blizzards in the winters of the Great Northern Plains. But, **regardless of the weather, the cows need daily attending-being milked & being fed.** Even if the barn is only 30 yards away from the house, a person can easily get lost during a blizzard, and their body not found until the spring thaw.

The **SNOW LINE** is something to which they can hold on, when they can't see their way.

In the storms of life, when the ravages of suffering are all about us, sometimes it's very hard to simply HOLD ON, to develop the endurance which produces character, which gives us hope – when we have nothing onto which to hold.

A SNOW LINE can, and DOES, save lives.

- A SNOW LINE is the **daily prayer discipline** that teaches us how to hear Jesus' Voice when all the storms are raging.
- A SNOW LINE is the **daily Bible study** that reminds us of how God is faithful, even when others are not.
- A SNOW LINE is the **regular immersion in a community of faith** that holds onto us and loves us when the rest of life around us seems to be disintegrating.
- A SNOW LINE is the **weekly discipline of fasting** that reminds us of how we really can live through times of emptiness, with God's help.
- A SNOW LINE is the **weekly receiving Holy Communion** that feeds us with something **NO OTHER DO-GOOD AGENCY OR GROUP PROVIDES.**

- A SNOW LINE is the **keeping of Sabbath** that reminds us of our worth even when we are no longer productive in the marketplace, when we are sick, when we are laid up. It helps us hear the very Voice of God, which is spoken in the Language of Silence

It really doesn't matter what we set out in life to do – as soon as we start down that road there are always opportunities to go astray.

- ⊕ Just ask the **Olympic athlete**.
- ⊕ Ask the **dieter**.
- ⊕ Ask the **recovering alcoholic**.
- ⊕ Ask the **recovering shop-a-holic**.

It's also true of anyone who is told that they are a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold. They believe it. They want to believe it. They want to live life, as though it were true. But there are always forces that try to tell them that they are not good enough unless they do such and such.

Another way to look at a SNOW LINE is to call it a **RULE OF LIFE** – that to which the person needs to constantly hold onto, in order to stay on track with where they want to go.

One of the dangers that the SNOW LINE prevents is to keep the person from getting lost **PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY DON'T REALIZE THEY ARE LOST.**

FUNCTIONAL ATHEISM is a **DANGER FACED BY ALL CHRISTIANS WHO DON'T USE A SNOW LINE**. Functional Atheism is defined as *someone who says they believe in God, someone that “worships” God, and yet someone who lives out their*

life as though they don't believe in God. Functional atheists almost never realize just how lost they are.

- **Functional atheists think they are Christians.**
- **But they don't rely on God for much of anything, other than a title.**
- **They work, work, work – not needing the Sabbath they say – never trusting in God's Providence.**
- **Their actions belie their real belief that their worth is not based on God's Valuation, but rather on what they are able to do.**

But, sadly, these functional atheists aren't able to see the truth in themselves.

They've lost their snow line. They've lost their way.

Does a snow line **BIND YOU** or **LIBERATE YOU**?

The snow line that I described above -- **prayer ; Bible ; community of faith; discipline of fasting; receiving holy communion each week; keeping of Sabbath** -- **these were all called "MEANS OF GRACE"** by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

Turn to the Hymn "Amazing Grace" (UMH 378) and substitute "snow line" for each place in hymn that uses "amazing grace" or "grace." You can see that it's about liberation, not bondage that the SNOW LINE, the RULE OF LIFE is all about. It's keeping us on track, not binding us up.

The snow line in the sanctuary today goes all the way from the baptismal font (*our naming as beloved child of God, precious and beautiful*

to behold) **clear up to the cross** (*our overcoming the power of the grave, our liberation from the power of death.*) **It's there for our whole life.**

And all along the way, we are liberated to interact with so many people (*I say as I walk along the rope to the congregation, using my carbiner and tether*) and deal with so much of life. But it always keeps me on track, never too far off course, never slipping away unintentionally into some of those things that Paul identified in today's scripture. It can even keep me on course from being sucked into the vortex of functional atheism, where we are lost in the unrealized sin of self-dependency.

I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now can see.

We can get un-tethered sometimes. Through *neglect* or *blindness* or *by lots of other ways*. Life is always offering us ways to be lost in the snowstorm.

Try not to let go. Hang on to the snow line of **daily prayer; daily Bible; regular immersion in the community of faith; fasting each week; receiving Holy Communion each week; keeping of Sabbath.**

The snow line does not make you good nor make you worthy. It just keeps you from getting lost.

But, the really GOOD NEWS I'm here to tell you. If you have let go, if you have become lost -- pick yourself up and get hooked up again. While you can. While you're still able to see the line. Do it today. And Hold On!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.