Sermon Title: Acceptable Limits
Text: Exodus 20:1-4,7-9,12-20; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14
By: Rev. Terry Carty
Date: 10-02-11
Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church
Season: 16th Sunday after Pentecost; Proper 22; Ordinary 27; World Communion Sunday

Main Point: God's precepts are greater than simple rules. They set the center of our acceptable limits. What are acceptable limits? Paul's approach was to press on and let God in Christ Jesus show us the way.

Read Philippians 3:4b-14

When I was 20 years old, I had the most accurate hook shot at Tennessee Tech. I stayed at school through Christmas break that year to work and I went to the gym for hours each day just to work on my hook shot. I was deadly. I rarely lost a game of HORSE.

Just how good are you? What is that thing that you do better than anyone you know - or at least that thing you do as well as anyone you know? There is something...
It may be the thing that gives you confidence to face each day. It is what keeps you going back to the same job every work day. Or it fulfills your leisure time. Or the memory of it brings back to pride of the moment.

But sometimes we realize that hook shot is not the most important thing in the game.

øøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøø

Paul had been so very confident. He was filled with pride for good reasons - at least in his mind they were good reasons. He was a full blooded Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin. He had studied hard and become a Pharisee - a Hebrew lawyer. He knew the scriptures backward and forward. He was filled with zeal and he was completely righteous under the law of Moses - he was blameless. He started each day completely filled with confidence because he had it all.

By the time he wrote this letter to the Christians at Philippi he had come to know that being innocent according to the Law was not all there is.

øøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøø

This morning the Coffee and Chat Sunday School Class discussed a commentary written by a United Methodist pastor who has been assigned to a campus ministry. Not having a campus serve on Sunday morning, he is a worshipper at a church in town.

Now he is seeing the church from a different perspective since he has moved from the pulpit to the pew.

He now considers it a myth that if we build up the church, we build up the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about. He says that thousands of church leaders, including himself, have built gyms, launched ad campaigns, preached trendy sermon series, added flashy technology, and generally tried to out-do the consumer culture. And all this was because they found their faith confidence only in church building.

The campus minister, sitting now in the pew, has come to realize that the discipleship that most committed Christians want is to live a life in the world without selfishness and fear. Most committed Christians really want to live richer lives of sacrifice and compassion. And most churches would be thrilled to be known for the loving character of their people rather than for their programs or technology.

øøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøø

So what did Christ bring to Paul? What has Christ brought to the campus minister? What can Christ bring to us in our journey of Christian discipleship? Christ brings us beyond the rigid righteousness of rules of faith. Christ brings us the knowledge of God's righteousness based on faith.

øøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøøø

Last week the government of Iran release the last two of three American hikers who were caught just inside the borders of Iran and charged with spying. The three had been hiking along the border of Iraq with Iran - what an adventure. But Iranian officials caught them across the border and imprisoned them.

When I first heard the story about those hikers two years ago, I felt that they were foolish to be hiking in either of those countries. But they were exercising their freedom to explore the boundaries of a newly freed Iraq.

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from a prison cell where he was being held for exercising his freedom t explore the boundaries of his newly found faith in Christ. He had discovered that by faith in Christ we expand our acceptable limits. We look out beyond the shelter of our church or of rigid rules and see that the boundaries are not fixed by walls. The boundaries are fixed by the beckoning of God to make Christ-like decisions and to live Christ-like lives in a real world.

As we go out of this safe place today, we step into a world with many unknowns and lives with many ambiguities. We often find ourselves wondering what are the acceptable limits - where is the border? Take with you the words of Paul, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.