



Pastor Gwen's Message
4th Sunday after Pentecost
"Discipleship"
Sunday, June 25, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel reading for today is filled with wonderful, well at least as far as preaching subjects go, ideas. A disciple is not above the teacher. Nothing secret will not become known. The body can be killed but not the soul. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father in heaven knowing. All the hairs on our head are counted (for some of us that would not take long to count.) We are more valuable than a sparrow. If we acknowledge Jesus, he will make sure that He acknowledges us to the Father. And now to the tough stuff. Jesus did not come to bring peace?? Jesus came to bring a sword. Jesus came to set son against father, daughter against her mother. Whoever loves father and mother more than Jesus is not worthy? And those who do not take up the cross and follow Jesus are also not worthy? And the final topic for discussion is, those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Jesus' sake will find it.

Well, do you see why it is such a conundrum for pastors to figure out what to talk about for one 8–10-minute sermon. This reading is just filled with possibilities.

Thinking about where we left off last week when our reading named the 12 disciples, and we talked about what our core values were. I guess I think there is more to say about how we are to act as Jesus' disciples and what we might encounter along the way. Because our reading today seems to give the disciples and us, some instructions as to what might be encountered in our service or attempt to bring the "Good News" to others. After all they were about to embark on a very holy mission in Jesus' name. These twelve men were about to go out and cast out demons, heal the sick, and tell everyone about Jesus. This folks, as you might imagine, is a daunting task. Their "Good News" may and will be received with hostility. There will be family strife, swords and talk about the dreaded cross.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is radically liberating. Our Romans reading today tells us that we have been set free from sin if we repent and believe in the teachings of Jesus, trying to follow his model of discipleship. For God redeemed us and set us free through the actions

of Jesus on the rugged cross. As Luther would say, we are freed from sin and freed to serve our neighbors. We are borne anew each day.

Through the waters of baptism, we become like Christ, died to sin, and come out dripping wet, resurrected to new life. Sin no longer has a grip on us. New life abounds as a free gift from what Jesus did upon his resurrection. Perfect freedom is ours, freedom to follow and serve our master. There is nothing we have to do. Our sins are forgiven when we repent, and the promise of abundant and everlasting life is confirmed by our belief in the one true God. All is accomplished through Jesus by our most loving God.

Through His mighty love for us, our lives should reflect his love to all people. No longer should we make distinction based on race. No longer do we divide people based on age. No longer do we calibrate people in regard to their mental and physical limitations. No longer do we discriminate according to gender identity. We must however regard all people from Christ's point of view. We need to look upon others through Jesus' lenses. The message of reconciliation for us to carry forward is radical, God loves everyone. This idea will transform all our thoughts and relationships. And that is where the rub comes in this Gospel message.

God wants to be in the middle of all our relationships. And when He is present it is very liberating to be free with one another. The idea that God's love is for everyone, and reflection of that love should be paramount in our lives, is a bit too "out there" or as our generation would say, "Way out man". God's love being equal for all people certainly tampers with our human hierarchies. The world tells us that the rich, beautiful, powerful are to be admired and praised. It does not agree with God's love law that we eat with lepers, embrace foreigners, clothe the naked and serve all people the Eucharistic meal.

All this and much more goes against what the world in Jesus' day under Roman rule told the disciples and our world today tells us. But we know that it is the Gospel of Divine Love that we are to follow. We should be shouting it from the rooftops that Jesus is Lord and brings love to all people. You probably would be in a psych ward if you were to do that today even in Park Falls and it was no easier in Jesus' day. The Jewish laws were very strict, and we all know that the Pharisees got bees in their turbans watching Jesus' behavior. They were not happy with the idea that we are all equal in God's eyes. As the story goes, we remember what happened to Jesus when He upset the Jewish way of life.

Paul in his letter to the Hebrews said in Chapter 4 verse 12, "Indeed the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Today, we don't often think of swords but on TV if we watch Dr shows we do see a scalpel. One commentary I read this week used this example: A surgeon deftly manipulates the scalpel to excise a tumor or dying flesh. When the procedure is over, the surgeon meets with the patient's family in the waiting room. If it was a surgery for a cancerous tumor, one of the first questions the family usually asks is, "Were you able to get it all out?" They want it ALL out. They want no chance that the tumor will come back again. Well, the divine word

is like that surgeon's scalpel. It is able to separate good from evil. Its goal is to free and liberate us from the forces of the devil. No evil should remain.

So, one would think that God's word would be a good thing. I know I was delighted when the Dr told me that he was able to get the entire tumor out during my surgery. What is not good about that?

Well, even among families God's word can be controversial instead of comforting. How does that old saying go, "God's word comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." And another rule that was in our family when I was growing up was that it was not polite to talk about politics, money, or religion. Sound familiar? As we mature in our faith, we find that it is a very loving act to share God's love with others. Hoping that someday they will see the truth and also get set on a path to justice and mercy.

A short story. One time a schoolteacher was registering two new students who were sisters. She asked their age and requested their birthdates. One of the sisters said, "We are both 7. My birthday is April 8th and my sister's birthday is April 20th." The teacher replied, "That's impossible." "No, it's true," said the other sister. "One of us is adopted." "Oh", the teacher said, "Which one?" The two sisters looked at each other and then the first one said, "We asked our parents that same question a long time ago. And they said, they loved us both equally and couldn't remember which one of us was adopted." Folks, that is how the God's grace works. God has no strings attached when it comes to loving us. God loves each of us the same.

So, remembering what our core values are as we look to have compassion on all our neighbors and share the love of God with them. This is our discipleship call that now falls on our generation. Even though discipleship can be costly, it leads to folks getting the bee out of today's bonnets. And the message is still true that discipleship comes with the liberating power of God's word in Christ Jesus. And what a better world we would have if all people were followers of our Lord and Savior. **AMEN**