

Sermon
Proper 17
September 3, 2017

How many people here wanted to be with the people in Charlottesville standing up against the White Supremist? How many people want to go to Texas to help in any way they can the people who are now homeless and perhaps have lost part of their family? And why is that?

Because being lovers of God our hearts are filled with love and compassion for all people in trouble and if we can help out we do. The location of these events make it difficult to be there to assist but we pray and donate items or money to assist in the healing and health of the tragedies. My Grandson had a lemonade stand yesterday entitled Lemonade for Harvey Aid.

We just have to DO something ... loving God's people is not a sedentary life, it is filled with activity. In today's Gospel Jesus says "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." He didn't say "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and have a seat!" He is asking us to carry our cross and follow, walk, run, skip, jump, follow ...

Thanks to a person in this parish I was able to attend a week long Homiletics Festival last May ... 3 full days and 2 half days of wonderful speakers sharing their sermon secrets ... assisting close to 1600 people in researching, writing, and delivering a sermon. Many of the speakers talked about reading the lessons in different ways in order to get a better feel for what God is trying to tell us. One speaker suggested we highlight all the verbs ... all the action words and hear what the Lord is saying.

The verbs we heard this morning in the Gospel were: show, go, undergo, suffering, killed, raised, took, rebuke, forbid, happen, turned, get, stumbling, setting, told, deny, take, save, lose, find, gain, give, come, repay, done, standing, taste, see, coming ... whew! And then we have our marching orders: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." ... A pretty active Gospel ... actually the whole Bible is filled with the activity of God. Not much gets done with out someone doing something. When people are actively involved things get done ... whether good or bad. Nothing happens in a vacuum.

Jesus was a mover and a shaker and there is a hint from Him how we, too, are to move and shake in order to get God's Love out in the world. Loving God is not a sedentary life it is filled with doing ... reacting ... marching ... feeding ... talking ... hugging ... joining ... singing ... praising ... and it goes on.

And when we are active in the life of love we seem to get activity back and when we get activity back we tend to commit to more activity.

Cindy Pullinger and I have started to touch base with A Safe Place ... homes that take care of people who were being abused. Our hearts have been leading us to get further involved. We've attended a couple meetings and would like to assist them in whatever way we can to help this ministry grow because there are hundreds of people out there wanting to find a safe place to live ... a place where their children can grow up without anger, beatings, stress when watching the fighting and arguing between their parents. The Center for Disease Control has gone on record to state that if domestic violence was a disease we would have an epidemic.

We have only started this journey and have heard only a few of the stories. But we are working to get a better handle on what is needed in Lake County. Next week I start Domestic Violence Training ... not to train me to be violent ... but classes to help me be a better advocate for A Safe Place so I can understand the causes and effects of Domestic Violence.

When visiting one of the facilities Cindy and I were moved when looking at the paper doves with writing on them ... they were taped on the walls throughout the hallways, playrooms, therapy rooms, ... they were doves of accomplishments ... when a person in the home felt like they accomplished something they wrote it on a dove and taped it on a wall to share with others. Stop for a moment ... and think about what did you accomplish lately ... we all have accomplished something.

Here are some of the accomplishments we read on the Doves at A Safe Place: ... Created a resume, and found a job ... Took my GED and passed my exam ... Learned English ... I found my voice ... I earned a car here ... Learned about budgeting ... We searched for the Big Dipper as a family ... Was able to get my son a new pair of glasses ... I spent quality time with my family violence free ... I got my child into gymnastics. The action words here: created, found, took, passed, learned, earned, searched, get, spent, got ... all words of action and progress.

Small accomplishments for some but major for others ... In Romans 14 we are warned not to judge others by what they do or do not do ... we are all accountable to God, **individually**, by what we do or do not do. We should never compare. There are people who just have more energy than others and people who have more time ... we do what we can, we just have to **do something**. What are we capable of doing? "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Are we denying ourselves of perhaps a television show once a month in order to make fix meals for the homeless. Are we denying ourselves of a second cup of coffee once a week in the morning to go to Starbucks and pick up food to deliver to homeless shelters? (You can have your second cup from there!) Maybe part of our cross is giving a couple hours a week to mentor/tutor Waukegan2College teens. How about on Sundays? Are we willing to officiate a service at Sunrise Assisted Living so they are able to have a weekly worship service and receive communion or give up an hour or two after church to take communion to others. Serving God is an active way of life and there is plenty to do right here in Lake County to keep us active and alive in the love life of God.

I mentioned earlier about the activity we receive when we are active. We all have stories ... wonderful things that have happened because we were actively showing the Love of God. One of my stories happened last week. I was walking down the street and an adorable brother and sister were walking to the bus stop to catch their bus for school. I said hi and they responded with a "hi" and a high five to my raised hand. The little boy ... energetic and smiling said he lived over there ... he pointed to the homeless shelter on the street (I knew it was a shelter because we bring Starbucks food to them). I said "Wow that is a nice house!" ... and he said "yes and big!" Then he continued so proud and almost like bragging ... "we don't live there alone, 10 other people live there with us!" I then responded about how much fun that must be and he agreed.

That, my dear friends, says it all. Those dear sweet children went from being homeless to a happy home. It reminded me of the great work A Safe Place does and that is what being active in God's love life brings ... pure joy! What is our cross carrying? Is it all that we are capable of doing? Or can we do more? Theologian and author Frederick Buechner impels us to simply listen to our lives, "God is speaking to you ... of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where ... you should go next." Let us listen and accept the cross God gives us and relish and share the joy we receive carrying **our** cross. Amen.

Rev. Linda Lutter