

Epiphany 3A 2020

(Can we) ever be united? How can we offer hope for a lasting peace? How are your ideas hindering the process?

(We are) the church....AND we are the church for the sake of the world. And today the world **(is a)** mess. And today that which once united us, our **(creedal)** proclamation of freedom, has led us to societal impasse. The poor are still poor. The wealthy get wealthier without concern for just-economic-domestic-health services for the least, last, and little. This is our concern because Jesus has called us, no less than he called Simon, Andrew, James, and John to step away from our ordinary-walkin' around life and put our faith and trust in God's providing. **(We are)** the church....AND we are church for the sake of the world.

I remember not so long ago that I began the sermon with Charles Dickens **(opening)** words from "A Tale of Two Cities". "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." This isn't new! Humans have waved their own limited views on how life should be for years. You know their effects on the world **(by their)** names: sexism, ageism, xenophobia, racism, humanism, secularism, wealth and power. By any of those names, thousands have suffered. By any of those names citizens have deemed themselves above the fray, above the law, and above those they judge. And what we are facing today is the institutionalizing of those narrow views as being, in and of themselves, righteous. BUT...no matter how much comfort any one of these might offer you, they are in no way righteous in the eyes of Scripture or of the Gospels.

(We are) the church, and we are church for the sake of the world. That means that we cannot rest in our own comfortable pews without **(caring)** for the hungry; without caring that every eligible citizen is registered to vote; without understanding that the results of injustice and pride cause children to go hungry, and the aged to go without affordable medical care. We are the church, and we are church for the sake of the world.

That's was **(Paul's)** sermon theme at Corinth for years! We are church, the called out ones who understand Jesus' ministry as the proclamation of the Good News.

(Confirmation) question #5 - "What is the Good News?" We, Lutheran Christians are quick to speak of "the good news" but what is it? Exactly?

You may be excited to say, **(that)** Jesus died for my sins." And while that is a popular answer, there isn't any good news in that death, is there? Isn't the Good News that Jesus **(rose on)** the third day, after he defeated the power of sin, evil, and death! That's good news.....but, Matthew didn't say anything about death and resurrection in this morning's Gospel, did he? I don't think so.

BUT....he did say "Jesus went through Galilee preaching the good news AND healing the people of all of their illnesses." The good news has something **(to do)** with healing??? Well, yes. But there is more!

The healing that Jesus performed pivoted on the forgiveness of sins. Those people believed that sin caused the diabetic's blindness, and sin caused the polio victim's lameness, and sin caused the Hansen's disease that we know as Leprosy. It was sin, sin, sin. And I have to tell you, I can even hear good church-people say things like "well, they must have deserved it."

That very comment is not the good news, and I can say that the person who said it does not understand why Jesus came to this earth.

It was **(for the)** good news...forgiveness brings healing. And that healing brings a new spirit and a new life. **(But,)** that forgiveness can be impossible for those who want to hold someone else guilty. Hold that grudge long enough, and your very heart will be destroyed. Heart disease has been linked to one's willingness to forgive or not. **(Grudge)** holders are a miserable lot. They are. Angry people, hurt people, disappointed people, frustrated people are a miserable lot, too!

And my guess is that **(those)** four fishermen were all of the above when they met Jesus. And my guess is that they were pretty sure they were right! It happens. But, Matthew is quick to tell us that the Good News that Jesus brings it for the sake of the world! **(So that)** the blind, see. So that the lame, run and dance for joy. So that the leper can be hugged and kissed by their family. **(Love)** is at the heart of the Good News, and of the church. We are the church to love one another. We are the church, and we are church for the sake of the world.

But if you look too closely at the world you'll see some pretty **(scary)** stuff. There's violence against people who are judged as less than. There's hunger for people who are judged as less than. There's a shortage of educational opportunities for people judged as less than.

See, that's exactly what happened **(at 1st)** Lutheran in Corinth. Pastor Paul had taught those people about the Good News of Jesus... hope, healing, peace, joy and all of that. But after he left, some of the members let their ism's rule the roost. **(One is)** more better if they are wealthy enough to have a street address. One is more better if they aren't a woman. One is more better if they aren't a child. One is more better if they aren't muslim, or mormon, or jehovah's witnesses. One is more better if their skin isn't black or brown. Do you see what can happen when views narrow, and self-pride infects you?

See, that's where we are, today. **(Can)** we ever get reunited? Not if women **(aren't)** seen as equals. Not if people are judged for who they love. Not if skin color is the first test of acceptability. Not if they cannot take care of themselves. Not if they...what?

St. Paul's letter is gonna name all of those, and more. All week **(long)** the news is tough, sad, and there is not one mention of the Good News Jesus brought to us, and called us **(to live like that)** because we are the church, and we are church for the sake of the world.

And when Jesus preached the good news people were healed. There were **(dances)** in the village centers, and laughter could be heard throughout the country. Why? Because Jesus called us to be church **(for the)** sake of the world. There is Good news for the least, the last, and the little. And you know, I don't know if we can ever **(re-unite)** until we are that.....first. Amen!

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January 26, 2020 New
Tucson, AZ