

Children's sermon (go away)

(Last) week we gathered in Houston with 31,000 youth and adults for five days of celebration, learning, and work. You will hear the stories of our youth on Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup>.

While there was a spirit of WOW in the air, there was an underlying reality that adult leaders and pastors talked about among ourselves. (Christianity) in America is in pretty deep trouble. 25% of adults who were members of a church 10 years ago, have left the church and the faith.

We leaders and pastors compared notes about attendance, Sunday Schools, youth groups, and if new people are coming. And I don't think the issue is secularism, or pluralism which is the "right-best" church. I think the major strain is (trust.)

People don't trust the church anymore. And when you think about it, why should they? (For the) past 40 years the Roman Catholic church has been embroiled in sexual scandals, which is not only found in pedophile priests, but members of the hierarchy protecting those priests who abuse instead of protecting the children.

The (Evangelical) pastors who railed against homosexuality are busted for propositioning male prostitutes, as well as trolling church youth. And then there are (the high) profile public preachers who live in huge estates and mansions, (insist) on buying their fourth private jet, while declaring earthquakes are because of homosexuals, (and that) that population should be caged like animals. How can a church that bullies its people with the threat of going to hell.....also say we love Jesus best?

And then you ask....who in their right mind would give the church the keys?

With that context, the readings for today are bright and clear.

(Ezekiel) receives his call from God...to go to my people....they are a stiff-necked people. Tough job! Now there would have been a time when I would ask how stiff is your neck? It was not a good question. But let me couch it this way: (how many) of you have ever had a bad day....and had someone slap your back and say "cheer up!" Or, have you ever been depressed, not sad, depressed, and had a well-wisher say "Oh snap out of it." Did that work for you? I know it doesn't cheer me right up....why,,, because of my stiff neck. There is resistance, and a lack of trust.

These are a stiff-necked people. Their great-great grandchildren were (elders) in the village when Jesus showed up. He preaches his word of amazing grace....BUT they don't trust those words. The problem is they know him. They know his family. ("Who) does he think he is?" asked one old codger.

They don't trust him. They don't trust that he speaks for God, or can do the things he says he can. And Mark then says the saddest words in all of the Scripture: (he could) do no deed of power there. He could do nothing.

But, (Jesus) continued to preach. Jesus continued to challenge the daily pace of everyday life. Jesus brought the power of the Holy Spirit to (heal) and change the people who encountered him. That power.... can only work.... if we are..... able to receive it.

(There) was power in Houston. There was, every night in the stadium. The Spirit's power brought the people to their feet. The community was electric and alive! Powerful things were done while there.....(BUT)..... we have come home. How do we charge this place with the

power of the Spirit we experienced? You'll hear that on August 5<sup>th</sup>. (How) can we make the Word of God so engaging that New Spirit's people will enter into its study and prayer? How can we do the necessary work of ministry in this place.... when we don't trust God's future? (When) we fear what we might become? When our necks have grown stiff because the scenery doesn't change.... Because we're used to the comfort.....because we want to have say in what we do and don't do.

The adult leaders and pastors talked about those things....looking to our youth to take upon themselves that (living,) confident, vibrant love of Jesus, and the soul stirring power of the Word of God, and the will to experience the presence of the Kingdom of God in this place.

This will be a hard work I am putting upon you.....New Spirit Lutheran church..... for your very survival.

So, together we need to do a few things in the coming months:

We need to come (together) as this community, and pray together in humility for the witness of abuses of the past, the way-past. We renounce them.

We need to work on (trusting) each other, and work to make others trust us. Only then will they believe that we are Jesus' people because they will experience Jesus in us, and trust him. We will.

We need to remember that all of this is not (about us) and our faith. No, all of this is about God, and that God is faithful, and that God is here. And yes, Jesus had some difficult audiences who resisted his teaching....but he was found worthy of the trust of the people who came to him. Jesus reigns.

We need to remember that there are some people (who will) never trust us, or trust in God. They have been abused and broken. They have been rejected and cast off. They have been accused and convicted. They have been hungry for peace but were bruised and ignored because they were strangers. They feel alone in this world, and were met with a shallow welcome and no follow-up. There's grace for that.

We need to be about that work....because we still have quite a few seats to fill....and the one thing needed for that to happen? (Trust)....can a guest or stranger trust that they will meet Jesus here in you?

It depends.....(on our) necks.