

Children's sermon (play doh)

(I was) 15 years old when I preached my first sermon. It was Youth Sunday at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Tempe, now University Lutheran. It was a small church with lots of baby-boomer kids, World War II and Korea veterans, ASU professors, and even a ASU coach or two. I'm not sure why I got picked, but I did. The pastor talked with me about a sermon that (focused) on "Youth, the hero." He said we would use the (story) of David and Goliath....to lift up the role of youth. I remind you it was (1965.)

Viet Nam was heating up. President Kennedy had been assassinated a year and a half before, and Lee Harvey Oswald was killed on live TV. The Civil Rights marches commanded the news, and a Jewish prophet from the New York projects sang a (song) with a tin-can voice and sharp-edged words. The times they are a-changin'.

My sermon talked about the young men, really (youth,) who went to war in Europe and the Pacific, in Korea, and in Vietnam. (Youth) who struggled with notions like freedom, and responsibility, and relationships, and music. Youth had become a word that adults would say with a descending tone. It was intended for us to know our place as the children of the "greatest generation" that Tom Brokaw would name 35 years later.

But, what I remember most was a theme the pastor had mentioned. (Times) change around us. Times changed when David, the boy, killed the Philistine giant, Goliath. Times changed when Jesus brought the Good News of God to face the tradition bound Jews, and the powerful Romans. Times changed in the industrial age. Times changed in the technological age. Times change but the (word) of God's love endures. Probably should have stopped there, but I ended quoting the projects' prophet Bob Dylan... (come) mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don't criticize what you can't understand, your sons and your daughters are beyond your command, your old road is rapidly aging. Please get out of the new one if you can't lend a hand.....for the times they are a-changing.

(I got) pats on the back and big hugs from the ASU students and professors who worshipped there.....and I got (grief) from....our parents. Go figure.

Have you noticed? (The) times they are a-changing. We have watched the waves of these changes over the past 15 years or so building....but something in our world has taken a decided turn. The times they are a-changing.

(Jesus) told skeptical Jews who were intrigued by his message that they would "know the truth....and the truth would set them free...." It makes a great bumper sticker. I've seen it as an amazing tattoo. You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Jesus was introducing a new way of thinking. He was introducing a new way of living. He was introducing a new way of loving these brothers and sisters, and those who were seen as outcasts, foreigners, and enemies. The Gospel message was one that would call us to embrace and welcome, to feed and shelter, to care for and protect. The Gospel message was one that calls us to pray for warmer hearts, and welcoming words, and radical hospitality for every person we encounter. The times they were a-changing.

Of course the people reply with a ("BUT").....but we have never been in bondage to anyone...(except) the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Macedonians, the Seleucids, and now the Romans....but we have never been in bondage to anyone. See that was a lie that they had been told. But...(when) a person believes a lie....that lie will never become truth. It can't. It isn't truth.

That's what Jesus was warning those following him at a distance. (The) truth will set you free.....but....they had believed a lie. The times they are a-changing.

Times always change. That's the nature of life. So, every (year on) Reformation Sunday Lutherans pull on their red-duds, and with self-congratulatory hymns sing with gusto songs of defiance.... In the 1960's Lutherans were proud to be free from the Pope. And Lutherans were proud of missionaries who were working among African, east Indian, and Asian people.....but, in reality few Lutheran churches welcomed those same people in their local churches. The times they are a-changin'.

Last year Lutherans stood in the spotlight...500 year anniversary of Luther's strong act. So in the past year....what strong act have we done to welcome, to deepen our confident understanding of Jesus' truth that will set us free....what strong statement have we made because we are indeed free?

What have we said to this city, this state, this country where a (spirit of) avarice has moved as a tsunami through this land. It is a spirit, that has bound the mind and souls of throngs of people stirred by (the lie) that there is not enough for us.....and that what we have will be taken. It is a spirit that has been stirred by the lie that human beings of other races, religions, sexual orientation, or physical appearance are somehow less human than those who have believed the lie.

It is a spirit that denies the very basic tenet of the freedom of (grace) that all are welcome, and that justice is not spelled "just us", and that God's gift of Jesus, whose life was taken upon the cross because all people have sinned, but that sin has been removed...for all people of every tongue, tribe, and nation. (But) somehow....someone has misunderstood that very truth that Jesus presented to that fearful group of Jewish folks.....and has lied about who is to receive grace, and mercy, and hope. (The times) they are a-changin'.

I contend that the very best of Biblical images for the understanding of Reformation is from Jeremiah 18. He's trying to show the Jewish people that their self-centered, self-satisfying, self-protecting spirits are not what God intended for them to be as the chosen people.

Go to the potter's shed. (Wet clay) turning on the wheel. The potter knows what this clay is going to become. BUT....the clay doesn't cooperate. The clay has....ISSUES. (The clay) wobbles, flops, and tears itself apart. A fine finish for a piece of art....wouldn't you say?

I see that wobbling, flopping, (torn) clay everyday in the news. The times they are a-changin'. Us against them. Us against us. We want what is ours, and we will be willing (to do) whatever we can to get what we want. That is the definition of avarice.

(But,) and there's always a but....God, the potter, is still God. That torn clay is drawn together. (We are) kneaded like a baker kneads dough. The strength of divine love woven in the promise of mercy for really stupid people, then centers us in the truth of God's grace. And the potter (centers) that wet clay on the wheel....us forgiven....us redeemed....us loved.... (Pulling) us up like a potter's thumbs draw up a clay vessel. And the Spirit of God works strength and wisdom and truth and peace and unity and grace and mercy and love to become what God has intended for you to become from the day of your borning cry.

That is the spirit of the reformation. And if you open your eyes and unstop your ears you will be sure to hear and see that (the times) they are a-changing....and on this day in history I cannot tell you that this is a good thing. What I can affirm is this....(you shall) know the truth, and the truth will set you free....all of you...with enough....where all are welcome.

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