

Sermon for Sunday, May 26, 2024

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever heard of an “elevator speech?” The idea is that you step into an elevator and discover that a very important person (someone you would like to have an appointment with but little hope that such a thing would happen) is also riding the elevator. You have one minute to make your point to that person before you get off the elevator.

My elevator speech for today’s sermon would be: The apostle Paul’s point to the Corinthian church is that as followers of Jesus they are called to pay attention to the other Christians in the community and to make life choices that will support and sustain the faith of those folks. The same is true for all of us.

It might be a little hard to parse out what Paul is saying in today’s Scripture reading because Paul’s language tends to be really dense. But I’m going to give it a try. In Corinth at the time that Paul is writing this letter there were many temples to gods (with a small g). It was part of the culture of that city that one would need to perform a sacrifice at a temple if one was going to ask that particular god for healing, or safe travels, or good weather, or abundant crops or whatever. Therefore as a resident of the city you would buy the appropriate animal and bring it to the temple so that the officiating priest could perform the sacrifice on your behalf. But what would be done with the leftover meat? There were two options: either take the leftovers to the market to be sold or cook it all up for a feast. Either way everyone involved understood that this meat had come from a sacrifice to a god that was NOT God the Creator/Father or Jesus, God’s Son.

Which brings up the question: If you lived in Corinth and called yourself a follower of Jesus should you purchase or even eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols? What would you do? That’s what the people of the Corinthian church were asking.

You may be wondering how this reading that was addressing a situation from 2000 years ago would have any pertinence to us. Let me give you a much more current situation that really happened. Mark’s Grandpa Larson was a Lutheran pastor and spent most of his career as pastor in Ada, MN. He had a cabin on Bad

Medicine Lake which was about 70 miles away from Ada. Grandpa loved to fish and sitting out on the lake with a hook in the water was relaxing and enjoyable for him. The cabin was a true cabin and didn’t have air conditioning which meant that it could get pretty warm in summer. A cooling beverage like a beer would have been very refreshing. Now Grandpa took his ordination vows very seriously and made a decision. He would never drink a beer at the lake because he never knew when a parishioner from Ada might drop in. He felt strongly that being caught drinking a beer would mean that he would be setting an example that would be detrimental to his parishioners and their faith.

I ask again, if you live in Corinth and call yourself a follower of Jesus should you purchase or eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols? Or, what about living a very disciplined lifestyle such that you always act as a positive example to the people you come in contact with? What if you would just really like a cold brewski now and again?

As Paul addresses the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols he maintains that such a choice is not a problem because an idol is a false god, something that doesn’t exist except in one’s imagination and has no power. But he expands on that understanding when he encourages the Corinthians to consider the influence that such a choice might have on those who observe them eating this meat. Which ties in with the example I gave about Grandpa Larson. Grandpa was free to drink a beer if he wanted to. But he would have been mortified to think that his action might be detrimental to someone from his parish. He simply didn’t have it within him to be a bad example.

Now before you think that I’m encouraging you to live lives of utter moral perfection; I want to make another point. We all, in spite of our best intentions, fail to be good examples. I teach the confirmation students that there are sins of commission: sins where we do something that harms another person and sins of omission: sins where we don’t act even though we know that we should. That’s the conundrum: we know what we SHOULD do, and we know what we SHOULD NOT do and yet in moments of weakness we act (or don’t act) badly.

So let’s pause and admit just that: that we sin every day and in every way with acts of commission and acts of omission. *(Pause)* Next let’s confess before God those failures because when we do so we acknowledge our human imperfections. *(Pause)* Then let’s

receive the good news: that through God's grace we are *absolved*; that God has forgiven our sin. (*Pause*)

Martin Luther taught that whenever you rise in the morning and wash your face, you should remember your baptism. Rise in the morning knowing that you are a child of God and that God loves you—even though we are sinful creatures who mess up, often. That's the miracle of grace, the miracle of God's love: God loves us just the way we are. And God proved it when Jesus came to earth and died on a cross for our sake.

While the world has changed quite a bit regarding whether pastors should be seen drinking a beer (or not) the idea that the apostle Paul is communicating is that we Christians are called to pay attention to our impact on the people around us. It's not just about pastors, it's about all of us as a community of faith.

In closing I will revise my elevator speech for today's sermon: as followers of Jesus we are called to pay attention to the other Christians in our community and to make life choices that will support and sustain the faith of those folks. We will almost certainly fail on occasion, but we must not let such failures drag us into some deep pit of depression. Instead we should remember our identity as God's child and God's never ending grace and love for us. Amen.

There is a line in one of the Anne of Green Gables books to the effect, "every day is a new day with no mistakes in it."

The announcement about Bayview Nursing and Rehab in Red Wing:

- Many of you have probably heard that Bayview will be closing in the next 60 days.
- Buildings have a life span: most of this building's systems including the heating and air conditioning systems, the elevators, and probably many other systems that I'm not aware of, are dying. It will take millions of dollars to bring it up to code. This is why it's closing.
- Many of the residents of Bayview have very fragile health and need lots of hands on care. This type of care is expensive and as you are probably aware, Medicare, Medicaid, and Disability payments barely cover the basic costs for care. There's nothing extra to put into the building.

- Bayview is where Wendy Anderson has been living for the last 9 months. It was never the plan for her to live there permanently, but a variety of circumstances caused her stay to continue on.
- I have been to Bayview many times to visit Wendy and the staff is remarkable. They are dedicated and compassionate. I have nothing but praise for their commitment to care.
- Wendy knows that Bayview is closing. The search is on to find her the most suitable place to live. Beginning next week, I will be changing one bit in the congregational prayers so as to specifically intercede so that she will be placed in a home that it is suited to her needs.
- This is all that I know and can share publicly at this time. If you have specific questions talk to me after worship.