

Sermon for Sunday, June 2, 2024

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Luke 22:47-51

Galatians 5:22-23

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

There is an old saying, one that some say originated as a Chinese curse: *May you live in interesting times*. I think that it is reasonable to say that this week's news demonstrate that we are living in interesting times. But I would not say that it is a curse; I would say instead that it is an opportunity!

The apostle Paul also lived in interesting times. Because we don't know for certain the years of Paul's life we can only speculate about the Roman emperors who governed while he was alive. We are reasonably certain that Paul was alive during the reigns of Caligula and Nero. These two emperors are historically noteworthy because Caligula was murdered and Nero committed suicide after being sentenced to death by the Roman senate. Certainly there was a lot of turmoil in governance during Paul's lifetime. In spite of this, there is another perspective to consider. The Roman empire's vast network of roads meant that people could travel. Which is exactly what Paul did: he moved from city to city and shared the story of Jesus and the good news of his death and resurrection. This message was very welcome to the people who were *living in those interesting times*.

Paul states in our reading for today that "an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel." Paul is compelled by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to travel through the Roman empire and tell anyone who will listen about the good news of Jesus: his death and resurrection. Now I am not of Paul's caliber. But I find it imperative today to say to you, "Remember Jesus the one who died and rose again. Remember that you belong to him; you are one of God's children; an heir of the kingdom!" When you participate in worship on a Sunday morning you confess your belief in just this. That implies that you will strive to live as Jesus taught. But his teachings are counter-cultural and challenging. Here's an example:

On the night that Jesus was arrested he went to the garden of Gethsemane. One scene from that story that doesn't get much

attention has to do with the atmosphere just as Jesus was arrested. All of the gospels report that one of the disciples had a sword. Here's how Luke describes the scene: Luke 22:47-51 "While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him."

Remember that Jesus, the one we follow, is the one who gave himself up to the powers of the world. Out of love for us, and as a demonstration of the enormity of God's love for the world he refused: he refused to resort to violence. He refused to call down angels to prevent his crucifixion or to remove him from the cross once he was crucified. Jesus went to the cross. Jesus went to the cross for the one who betrayed him. He ALSO went to the cross for those that judged him guilty. He ALSO went to the cross for those that obeyed orders and physically hung him to die. Finally, he went to the cross for us and for our salvation. And while it is important for you to take this personally, it is also important for you to admit, to recognize, to internalize, that Jesus also went to the cross for your neighbor: a neighbor who might also be one that you deeply disagree with on all kinds of issues.

No more of this! Those words need to ring in our ears. As followers of Jesus we are to shun savagery and to avoid violence. We are to be the ones who listen to the stories of brokenness in the world. We are to be the ones who bring healing to broken people and broken places of this world. We are to be the ones who tell others about the God of love because this is a message that will transform the world.

Later in today's reading Paul writes about how he "becomes all things to all people so that I might by all means save some." Paul is so passionate about the saving grace of God that he shapes himself and the way that he lives so that those around him become open to hearing the transformative message of the gospel. That means that he puts himself in odd places, places where the rich and the elite of his time would never go. Why? He says, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings."

Paul's words present a challenge for us. It's tempting in these interesting times to circle the wagons, withdraw from the world,

and create a safe little enclave where (hopefully) nothing bad ever happens. Tempting to only talk to people that you agree with. And maybe that's what you need to do to keep yourself mentally and emotionally healthy. (I will not judge you for that choice.)

But I will challenge you to consider this: over the last week I have been all over Goodhue County and beyond visiting people. I've been to Cannon Rivers assisted living, up to see Merle & Rita Pearson in Savage, brought communion to Melvin & Nancy Trelstad, saw Rodney at the hospital, as Johnny Cash sang, "I've been everywhere man!" But the world is a very big place and I cannot be everywhere. I cannot share the message of God's love in all the needy places of this world. I need your help. The world needs your help. You too, have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit so that the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that are hallmarks of being followers of Jesus might be on display. It's not just about me; it's about us; all of us working together.

The world is a big place. God's vision for the world is that the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will be exhibited in all places and at all times. Use these interesting times within which we live as an opportunity. Be brave. Be courageous, but most of all, demonstrate what it means to be a follower of Jesus; living in peace and harmony with all people. Amen.

We are to be salt and light.