

Rev. Lynne Ogren
June 10, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Mark 3:20-25

Let us pray. Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will, through Christ our Lord. Amen

This week our Vacation Bible School theme was based on the adventures of Paul. The children learned about the persecution Paul experienced because of his faith in Jesus and how that did not stop him from preaching the gospel in places where the idea of worshipping one God, and a God who would send his Son to die on a cross, was a crazy notion!

The children spent time in the marketplace of ancient Athens where the shopkeepers did not know about this unknown God or his Son, Jesus. The children were sent to tell the good news that God loves us (!) and God cares for us (!) and that God sent his only Son to forgive us (!). And let me tell you, we have some amazing evangelists in our midst!

The God that Paul preached to the Greek world of his day was a counter-cultural god. The world at that time was all about worshipping gods who granted either rewards or punishments based on people's behavior. There were many gods for many purposes. People worshiped them out of fear.

Jesus wasn't like that. Jesus entered into relationship with the world to shower people with God's compassion and love. That's not how the world worked back then. Jesus was counter-cultural.

Do you think that's still true today? Are there people in the world who see Jesus as weird or even dangerous? The world still has a hard time experiencing grace and forgiveness and even love, especially if these are offered freely to everyone.

In our gospel reading today, we are only in the 3rd chapter of Mark's gospel and Jesus has been very busy! He has been healing people left and right, and casting out demons. These acts, while amazing and life-giving, were also seen as suspicious and threatening to the leaders of the Jewish church. They are accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, the ruler of all demons sometimes known as Satan. This, of course, frightens Jesus' family and they wonder if he is going crazy.

The thing that was crazy about Jesus was that everything he did and said was based in love—God's love for all people and all creation. His acts of healing and casting out of demons were all meant to free people from the powers in the world that held them captive.

We don't know exactly what those demons or evil spirits were in Jesus' time. But we do know about the forces in the world that cause us to struggle with one another and to build walls in order to keep control of the world around us. They are the forces of suspicion, despair, hate, and fear. They are the powers of consumerism, racism, sexism. They are the spirits of competition, domination, and prejudice.

Now, this country and many other structures in the world are based on the economics of gathering and spending, competing and improving in order to become stronger and more

powerful. We need structures for our lives together that have people in positions of power and consequences for those whose actions cause harm.

But when these structures and powers are used at the expense of the well-being of human lives, when they cross the line between supporting and providing to oppressing and dominating, then those who follow Jesus and worship the God of love are meant to call out these demons and expose them for what they are—temporary structures that were designed by God for the well-being of creation.

Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, “Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak...” (2 Cor.4:13) We are children of God who are called through faith in Jesus Christ, just as Hazel Skye was this morning, to trust God, to proclaim Christ through word and deed, to care for others and the world God made, and to work for justice and peace.

This week the children came to Vacation Bible School each day telling about their “God sightings,” the ways they saw God at work in the world. Some talked about seeing God active in the rain and thunder or in the life of their pets and other animals. Some saw God in the love they received from their families and friends. Some of the kids even heard God’s voice as they prayed and met Jesus in their dreams.

It is a good practice to pay attention to the ways God is the source of life and love in our everyday lives.

It is also important to see where the forces of evil need to be called out, to be exposed for the ways they are cutting off life and abundance in the world. The Church—the living, breathing, speaking Body of Christ—is called to cast out the demons that bind and harm and cut off just as much as we are called to build and plant and heal and open doors so that the power of God’s love is made known through the spirit of compassion and hope.

This is the counter-cultural, good news we have to share with the world. Some people might think we’re crazy. Some might be suspicious of a love that has the power to free and bring new life. But “we do not lose heart,” as Paul writes. “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Cor. 4:16—5:1)

In the meantime, “Let us build a house where ALL can dwell and all can safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end divisions: where all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.”¹ Let us sing together!

¹ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #641 “All Are Welcome” Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950. Text © 1994 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission. One-License A-725307