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November 11, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
25th Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Mark 12:38-44

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

When I spend time with the scripture readings for the week, one of the things I look for is to see what God is up to. It is tempting to read them to see what it is I am supposed to do or to be and that's not necessarily wrong. But when we can see how God is at work, we learn to live in the light of God's activity in the world, especially as we recognize Jesus as God's living Word for us.

We are winding up our year in the gospel according to Mark. Earlier this fall we heard Jesus tell us that those who would be his disciples would learn to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. We have a couple more Sundays in Mark to learn what this might mean for us.

In our gospel reading today Jesus has been teaching in the temple and as he and his disciples make their way toward the door Jesus is noticing the people.

The first people are the scribes who are easiest to see and he has some harsh words for them. But then Jesus sits down. He watches the crowd. He sees the rich and he sees the poor, including a widow woman who places her last two coins in the treasury.

As disciples, students and followers of Jesus, let's sit down with Jesus and look around.

Who are the easiest people to see? Those who dominate the headlines, for sure. The campaign ads have ended this week, but we continue to hear from the candidates who were elected and those who were not. We heard reactions from voters who were either happy or disappointed by the outcomes.

This week our eyes were drawn to those who became the latest victims of yet another mass shooting in our country, as well as those who survived but will have to learn to live beyond that horrific event.

Thousand Oaks is also home to California Lutheran University and now, in addition to grieving the death of one of their recent graduates, this community is dealing with the threat of a wildfire in the surrounding area. People are evacuating their homes. And then there's the fire in northern California which has destroyed an entire town.

The people we see in these and other news stories are rather like the crowd Jesus is watching. There are different people from various backgrounds. We saw people who were motivated by one reason or another to seek a position of leadership. We saw a hero who rushed into a building with an active shooter only to lose his life. We saw the anguish and anger of grieving fathers and mothers.

And we also saw a veteran, a young man who had served our country for four years in the Marine Corps. He was a human being who had been wounded emotionally and psychologically, probably even before his time in the military.

The national and global news is not only one way to sit with Jesus and see who he sees. As we sit here together this morning, who do we see?

When I first came to Zion I suggested we sing some hymns during Communion. One of our members told us that they like to pay attention to the people at that time because they can see who is seated toward the back as they come forward. I appreciated that comment.

Maybe we are looking for the people we know so we can try to catch them after worship to visit a bit. This is a great place to connect with our friends. Or maybe you are among our natural welcomers who seek out a new face and introduce yourself to them.

I visited with a couple this week who have not been to church for some time because of illness and pain. They are both feeling better and thought they would start coming back to church but they were worried we might think they were visitors. So maybe part of our seeing is to notice who is not present with us.

With Jesus, can we see the single person who doesn't have a family to worship with? Do we see the one who steps out of worship because they don't want anyone to see them weeping? Do we see the parent with the wiggly child, not to scold them but to give them a smile and word that we are glad they are here? Who do you see?

Or maybe you wonder if anyone sees you, especially if we are struggling with something most people would not be able to see.

Maybe you wonder if you have anything to offer to God. Jesus sees you.

Perhaps you are grieving today. Jesus sees you.

Maybe you are worried about your future or your child or whether you can pay the bills this month. Jesus sees you.

Jesus rightly points out in our gospel reading that religious institutions can fall short of the ministry God intends for them. When that has happened from this community of faith, I offer to you my sincere apology. The gospel reading today is a word that calls us as a congregation to watch for those who are in need of a word of welcome and grace.

The gospel reading is also a word that I hope speaks to you if you are feeling unworthy or unsure of your place. Jesus sees you and as God's called and gathered people we know it takes all of us to extend God's care to one another.

In the coming weeks it will be easy to let the extra activities of the holiday season blind us to the people around us who are so easy to overlook. Let us find ways to sit with Jesus and open ourselves to seeing through his eyes.

Who is sitting alone at the coffee shop? Who is in need of a smile as you cross paths at the grocery store? Who is doing the best they can with the circumstances they are dealing with and could use a word of grace and encouragement?

Jesus sees us for who we are—human beings and beloved children of God. Let us take up the cross that helps us to see with the eyes of Christ, deny looking too long at ourselves, and follow Jesus as we give the gift of noticing the people God places in our path.

Thanks be to God. Amen