



Lutheran Church of the Master
Pastor David Kappus
October 18, 2009 - Mark 10:35-45

Quite a story we have here this morning. Have you ever tried to tell a friend something really important only to have them apparently not hear you and come back with a totally unrelated request of you? Jesus has just told his disciples, for the third time, that he is going to die and soon. To be precise, it is now five days before Jesus' crucifixion. Four days before his betrayal and trial. One day before the clearing of the temple. A few hours before the Triumphal Entry.

Perhaps, at this moment of crisis in Jesus' life, we should take a moment to look at the men (in this case) Jesus chose as leaders for the early church - Matthew was a cheat, tax collector; Judas would betray him and was apparently suspected of stealing from the group's treasury, Peter would deny Jesus not once but three times, Nathaniel was the bigot (can *anything* good come out of Nazareth), Thomas the doubter, James and John, ambitious opportunists. And lest we think there were at least a couple faithful and stout hearts among them – they ALL ran away in the garden of Gethsemane.

As for other examples of great leaders in the Bible, well...Noah was a drunk, Moses was a murderer, King David was an adulterer on top of murderer, even the Apostle Paul must be seen as a murderer according to Jesus' expansion of the 5th commandment for Paul had been approving of Stephen's martyrdom and was "ravaging the church", "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1).

Jesus never punishes or chastises John and James for their selfish ambition, he just redirects it. He doesn't rebuke Thomas for his doubts but encourages his belief. He doesn't call Nathaniel out for his bigotry. He simply shows him his Lordship by saying "I saw you under the fig tree" without adding "and by the way, I heard what you said, too." And even Paul, though he laments of being "the chief of sinners" and complains of a thorn in the flesh which God will not remove, is used to spread the Gospel to places that the early church would never have imagined.

Yes, the foundation of our church may be built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness but every other part of it is built on the witness of flawed people.

Is it possible that the same "discipleshipial" makeup might be found in the average Lutheran congregation on any given Sunday? Thank goodness we are an ABOVE average congregation! Whether we are a congregation of cheaters, betrayers, thieves, deniers, bigots, doubters, manipulators, cowards, drunkards or murderers would be hard to accept but...the Gospel truth? This is a good reminder that all of us follow Jesus incompletely and yet he works through us to bring the message of the gospel to people only you can reach in your sphere of life.

So now that we've sort of raised the question, you should know that November 1st brings a chance to show what kind of disciples we truly are. And it will have less to do with how we vote than how we respond to the outcome.

Our witness to the community and the effectiveness of our ministry to it is affected by our reactions to ministry issues and opportunities. How does our handling of this issue among ourselves define us in the community? Can we be believed as a community of grace if we do not spend any of that grace on one another? We have a community that meets in this building – Lutheran Academy of the Master - that is watching how we speak to and live with one another in the face of disagreement. What witness do we give when we choose to walk away from one another instead of continuing our shared ministry in this congregation and community?

There's a telling thing in our Gospel story. The disciples had their share of diversity and disagreement but they stuck it out together. The other disciples were angry with James and John for their request but James and John did not walk away in their disappointment or shame nor did the other disciples turn them away but under the leadership of Jesus who was perfect they all continued to work and minister together.

Jesus calls us to be servants, broken ones at that, who band together with other broken servants to do our best to follow Jesus knowing that we will never get it totally right. Yep, that about sums it up... we're just a bunch of broken people connecting to other broken people whose peace is found not in all being perfect (or even all being the same) but in Jesus who broke himself for us--and continue to break himself for us--so that we could be made whole.

We have a mission and ministry to do in this community. Whether this congregation leaves the ELCA or not or whether you as an individual leave this congregation or not, you still have a ministry to do in this community. I want to challenge us to five commitments. Please write these down. These are responsibilities incumbent on children of the Kingdom.

The first is an unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. 'Nuff said.

The second is a commitment to seek an unlimited filling of his Holy Spirit. That's where our wisdom and power come from.

The third commitment is to a personal ministry of evangelism. That is, to always be ready to give a brief account of why you are a Christian, and to pray for certain people who have not yet responded to the Gospel. You can continue to use our Person 2 Person resources for this one.

The fourth commitment is to tithe, to commit at least 10 percent of one's income to God's work. I am reminded of a story about when Mother Teresa visited Los Angeles a few years ago. A physician named Gerald Jampolski heard her speak. Attracted by the spiritual power that emanated from her, he asked her, "Would it be alright if I accompanied you on your coming tour to Mexico? Whenever I am around you, I feel the presence of God."

She replied, "Dr. Jampolski, I do not object to your joining me, but you said you wanted to experience inner peace. Find out how much it costs to fly to Mexico and back. Give that money to feed and clothe someone in need, and you will find the inner peace you seek." Dr. Jampolski followed her advice and discovered she was right.

The fifth commitment is to be involved in at least one major service in our community. That may be anything from Habitat for Humanity to Family Promise to Diakonia to serving young women with difficult pregnancies. I have decided to become more involved with Diakonia to help promote peace in our community and become more aware of the major issues we face here. Each of us ought to be able to answer this question of Jesus: What am I doing to heal Coeur d'Alene in the name of Jesus?

Does that question sound strange? Did you hear his command, "But it is not so among you; but whoever wished to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." Slave of all, you mean, last??

In living these commitments out, what does it mean to be last?

We should be the last to leave the side of a sick bed. We should be the last to let a grieving spouse sit alone. We should be the last to write off the children whose parents have failed them or thrown them away. We should be the last to ignore the homeless camped out along our streets. We should be the last to allow hunger to gnaw at the bellies of our neighbors. We should be the last to shrug our shoulders at ongoing environment degradation. We should be the last to let despair grind down the powerless. We should be the last to condone cruelty of any kind, to any living thing. We should be the last to let human hatred triumph over divine love.

That's a tall order there. I can't do it all myself. But then, I never have...you have always joined me in the work. Stephen Ministers and caring members, with training and support provided by this congregation, visit the sick and lonely. Pastors, mentors and volunteers have used their gifts to counsel, nurture and love the youth of our congregation from the "perfect child" to the one in JDC. We care for the homeless through our involvement in Family Promise. We contribute tons and tons of food to the food bank. WE advocate for the poor. WE strive for peace. WE preach the love of God in Christ Jesus and him crucified. WE do this together because that's how God has designed it to work best! I cannot...I will not say "I have no need of you" for you are a member of the Body of Christ and you are HERE for a reason that God has ordained. If I were you, I would pray, without ceasing...I would think, more than twice, about leaving, no matter what happens in the next few weeks. God called you here for a reason, with gifts that are needed in THIS congregation in ITS mission to serve THIS community...we need you.

The disciples accomplished everything they did because they hung together to learn as much as they could from Jesus together even in spite of their differences and obvious flaws. I highly doubt that this instance was the first time that the disciples had any disagreements or fights among themselves. In any number of the movies made about Jesus and his life, you see the disciples arguing about one thing or another all the time and it always struck me as being pretty honest, pretty realistic. So with their various disagreements and various expectations about what Jesus was all about, they stuck it out together and they worked it out together and each used their own particular gifts to spread the Gospel message in many and various settings. Interestingly enough, you know what I think James and John's first mistake was? They wanted to *sit*. There's not much sitting in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

And so, with the good and the bad of it, they are an example for us. Even though we may not agree about everything, God has brought us all together to this place with the gifts that are necessary to do his work and have a ministry for him here in Coeur d'Alene. Are we going to continue together to do this ministry or will we go our separate ways? God does not ask agreement of us...only that we recognize that we are UNITED in His son, Jesus. And Jesus has a to-do list that will take all of us to accomplish. Amen.