

Sermon
3 Pentecost—Proper 7-A
June 21, 2020
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Jeremiah 20:7-13
Psalm 69: 8-11, (12-17), 18-20
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

This pandemic stay at home thing has been hard for everyone.
Hard for those living alone, or with a contentious spouse.
Hard for those like my son and daughter-in-law in Chapel Hill with three kids under 10.
Hard on our next-door neighbors, who gave birth to their second child last week.
Hard for those shut in with teenagers.

The spiritual teacher Ram Dass, said to his young followers back in the day: "If you ever think you've reached enlightenment, that is, spiritual maturity, just go live with your parents for a couple of weeks and see how that goes."

In first century Palestine they weren't in a pandemic, but they were in the middle of Jesus's Kingdom of God movement which put its own stressors on families and communities.

Why?

First, Jesus is leading people into a more open consciousness, which means they now see the world from a different perspective than the people they live with, **causing dissention.**

Second, Jesus is forming people into One New Humanity, the Beloved Community, which includes folks that are excluded by society, **causing dissention.**

In bringing us a new way of being human, Jesus is creating new wine that destroys the old wine skins of the status quo.

Ronald Reagan was right when he said, that "Status Quo" is Latin for "the mess we're in now."

Think about our status quo—a killer virus, financial inequality, massive unemployment, racial and sexual systems of oppression, and the universal belief that the solution to violence is more violence.

This is the mess we're in now.

As the song says, "we need a little Christmas, right this very minute". So here's a positive thought: some folks who have been shut-in these past months have been on a forced spiritual retreat that has helped them find a deeper, calmer center from which to live. People are opening up to God, Spiritual Presence, that is leading them along the yellow brick road to the Commonwealth of God.

Jesus calls us to take the next step on this journey into deeper faith. And “faith” here doesn’t mean trying harder to believe the doctrines of the church or trying harder to be a nicer person.

Faith, in addition to meaning “trust”, also carries the meaning of “allegiance”.
To have faith is to give Jesus our allegiance.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, **“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.”** If our first allegiance is to our finances, our family, our ethnic group, or even to the nation, then we have turned good things into idols that do not have the power to heal and transform us.

Well, is Jesus saying we should ignore our father on Father’s Day? Of course not! He is saying **when we give our primary allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom, we are allowing God to bring into harmony everything else around him.**

As C.S. Lewis famously said: “Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth ‘thrown in’: aim at Earth and you will get neither.”

Or as Jesus puts it: “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

This is what Paul is getting at when he says: “We know that our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed, **and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.**”

Paul uses the singular here—**sin, not sins**. It is not enough, he says, to fix only my individual sins. We are being called to **let God uproot the sin that underlies and empowers my sins and the sins of society**. It is a good thing to stop discriminating against People of Color, but it is also necessary to work with God to uproot the white privilege and systemic racism that controls our society.

Imagine you own a gas station. One Monday you have three cars come in with flat tires because they picked up a nail. You gladly fix the tires. Then the same thing happens on Tuesday and Wednesday, so you finally get curious and wander up the street to see where all the nails are coming from. Now you’ve gone from dealing with individual sins, to look for the underlying systemic cause. Once that problem is identified and fixed, then real change will happen.

And Jesus knows this is where we will run into conflict: working to end oppressive structures and systems, **will not please those who benefit** from the way things are.

Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Brazil put it this way, “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”

This should never surprise us. Jesus says, “if they call be Beelzebub”, which means “Lord of the Flies”, don’t be surprised if they bring out the bludgeons and the dogs when you are trying to peacefully cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge on the March to Selma in 1963.

Following Jesus in this contentious time may cause problems at home or at work and most definitely with the Powers that Be who have too much to lose if the status quo changes.

Thursday night we watched "Harriet", the excellent 2019 movie about Harriet Tubman, who led so many slaves to freedom. Her owners put up a large reward for her capture, because **they can't imagine** how they can run the plantation without slaves.

If pledging allegiance to Jesus and the Kingdom were easy, we'd already be there.

As G. K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried."

Seeking first the Kingdom will raise our conscious awareness, lead us to imaginative and courageous ways to end the systems that make us sick, and create the compassionate community that better reflects the One New Humanity we are in Christ.