

Sermon Pentecost 17 2021

10 am service: I want to welcome several visitors here today. We welcome Conor and his family and are delighted they are with us. Very soon Conor will be the most recent adopted member of the family of Jesus Christ by his Baptism. You will of course all be welcome every week that you can be with us. We also welcome the Muttart family. Janet ended her earthly life just over a year ago. Last September we celebrated her life. Her sons, Doug, Darren, and their children with other family members are all here today in remembrance of her.

Have you ever found yourself following a loser? If you have what sort of memories are arising? Did you abandon him or her quickly or did you stay longer than you really intended hoping things would change and improve? Sometimes it is easy to leave other times not so. When the Titanic was sinking there were few places to go. Think of Jesus disciples who had been with him for a while (I have no idea how long they were with him before the incident we heard about today happened.) But they have seen him do wonderful things. He turned water to wine, he healed many, many people from their diseases, he fed 5000 from the contents of one little boy's lunch bag, he walked on water, he brought a young man back to life in compassion for his widowed mother. So many wonderful things they had witnessed he had done so how could he be a loser? Yet here he is telling them someone is going to betray him, and he will end up being killed. They must have been truly baffled, worried too as this is the second time, he has warned them about what is to come.

We are hearing about the challenges facing women and girls in Afghanistan now that the Taliban have taken over the government. They are worried, as to what life will be like going forward having had opportunities in the last 20 years which would have been unheard of in the previous Taliban regime. Some of our girls, daughters and granddaughters of Messiah members have been writing to girls in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. The local coordinator has just let us know that the project will probably end as the Taliban are likely to forbid it. The high school the girls attend is no longer open, only schooling for grades k-6 is now available. Sediqa, one of their girls sent a picture of what the project had meant to her. She showed two girls one from each country, standing beside opposite sides of large globe each with a letter and each envisaging a time when they can be together. So sad.

You too might be worried about the future. Covid with the delta variant is still very much in our midst. Thus, you are all asked to wear masks when near anyone. Our world politically is alive with nations is uprisings, challenging others. Power and control over others seem to be what many nations are looking for. The climate is really challenging with so many fires out of control worldwide, droughts, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding – in places where there have been no floods previously. Yes, we are all worried.

Back to Jesus disciples. What do they do with their worries? They were afraid to talk to Jesus about them. Is that you? Are you afraid to talk to people about the things that worry you, whatever they are? When you try and contain them and not talk about them it is you who suffers of course. It can be very helpful to talk about what is on your heart and mind. One question arises, of course, to whom do you address your concerns and worries? You may have a therapist, a trusted friend, a spiritual director, or clergy person. I will try always to be available to you. But the one who is always available is God.

In the portion of the letter James wrote which you heard today he reminded you that the wisdom God offers you is unlike that of the world. The world is challenging for us to live in today and it

was challenging around the middle of the first century when James is thought to have written his letter. But he was aware that his readers, like you, could choose to follow ways which were destructive to their well-being as well as offensive to others with whom they connected. He wrote:

But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. Ouch!

However, God's wisdom is this he said:

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

What God offers you, said James, is a way of life which is different from that of the world. It excludes worry and selfish ambition. He reminded his readers of this, reflecting what Jesus had said to his disciples. Because as you heard in the Gospel today, Jesus was not afraid to address the disciples about their private conversations. He knew what was in their hearts and what they had been arguing about. He knew that debating who was the greatest among them had been the theme of their conversation. Jesus could have yelled at them, told them how self-centered they each were. Instead, he told them that they had to be willing to be the servant and not grab the top position. Then he used a child to illustrate his example. In the culture of that day children were nobodies. They had no rights, and as far as their fathers were concerned, they were just mouths to feed. Only when they grew to be old enough to work and to go with their fathers to listen in the synagogue were they real people. Jesus said to his disciples they needed to be as lowly as any child. Today children do have rights, they are privileged, they do count. Think of all the ads on the media placed solely to get the attention of the kids so that they plead with their family to buy them whatever it is. I was really aware of the power of a child years ago when I was a camp director for a church in Paterson. One day at camp a girl of about 11 came to me telling me she has been in an argument with her mother who would not let her do something. The child said she was thinking of calling DYFS when home again (it was DYFS back then) and telling them her mother had abused her. I did talk with her for a while trying to help her see the wrong, she was doing but she knew the system very well and did not care about what would happen to her mother – she just wanted to get her own back. Children today have power they did not have in previous generations

But there are powerless groups in our world and in our nation. The migrants who want to flee their own country and come here are powerless. Any refugee is powerless. The slaves of the system we had were powerless just as those in human trafficking today are. It seems we use the new term instead of slavery, but it is the same. You maybe want to think of other groups too.

What Jesus is asking you to do is to be aware of who you are and how you are to care for those who are so powerless. Little Connor will grow up in the US as a privileged child and man. He can be helped to understand his role in this challenging world. Jesus gave you many commandments about how to live today. But he insisted that the two all-encompassing commandments were to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you think of those two commandments, how are you fulfilling them? Jesus lived them both. He spent time alone praying and being with God. He loved everyone who wanted his help, his healing love. He turned no one away. The parables he told reflected his love especially love for the outsider, the down trodden in society. He challenged what was wrong in the culture of the day, how the religious authorities were distorting God's laws of love into their own bureaucracy. But he was never a loser; he overcame death. He was of

course a servant; he was not a hot shot. So today think how you are following him. How are you loving God? Think, how you are showing love to the disadvantaged, how you are serving others. His way can be hard, but he is there to guide you. Remember he will always be there beside you. He will never leave you. Finally, I leave you with a quote from one of my favorite theologians, Frederick Buechner: "Remember there are words of hope and healing which will never be said unless you say them, and deeds of caring and compassion which will never be done unless you do them." Amen.