

## Sermon for June 25th, 2017

Grace to you and peace through the Holy Spirit, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. First of all, this sermon starts with giving you thanks for the vacation time. Anna and I had a fabulous time going down the coast of Oregon and into California. We spent lots of time on beaches and hiking among giant redwoods. We even got some kayaking in while we were away. Basically, whenever we weren't asleep we were outside somewhere enjoying the wonder of God's creation; unless, of course, we were *eating* the wonders of God's creation.

But as stunning as the beauty of creation is, according to the gospel reading today, *we* are much more valuable to God. How's that for a boost to your self esteem? Sure, the giant redwoods are spectacular, but God loves you more. Yes, the Pacific Ocean is magnificent, but God loves you more. Indeed, the clear, blue water of Crater Lake is stunning, but God loves you more. You are more valuable to God than any of those things because you are made in the image of God.

A few weeks ago we read Psalm 8 where we heard that we are just a little lower than God. We were given dominion over the earth and it is our job to take care of what God has created. But God loves us, people made in the image of God, more than any mountain, more than any ocean, and more than any tree. Jesus says we are more valuable to God than many sparrows.

The problem arises when we get our priorities messed up. Too often we foul up the pecking order. Too often we think we know better than God. Too often we try to be higher than God, when the psalm says we are a little lower than God. Too often we think we know God's plan but we wind up just being offensive by trying to explain away tragedy as 'God's will'. Too often we get too serious about being right and not serious enough about being loving and merciful. Too often we place value on things more than people, when God has said we are of more value than many sparrows. All people, no matter who they are, have more value than many sparrows. All people, no matter who they are, have more value than any of the things of the earth.

Jesus says, "A disciple is not above the teacher." When we think we can outsmart God we have a serious problem. We tend to put too much value on the things of this world when our real value is not on things at all. Our real value is on relationships. Our real value starts with our relationship with God and continues with our relationship with each other. Our real value comes when we realize that each person God created has value because each person God created bears the image of God. We are all more valuable than many sparrows.

With this new found sense of self esteem what do we do about all those people we don't like? What do we do about all of the people who seem to wish us harm? What do we do about the problems of this world? The first thing Jesus would say to do, I

believe, is to let go of fear. Jesus said, "So have no fear of them."

The second thing is to speak up. Once you have no fear of anyone you are free to speak up. Jesus said, "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." You see what Jesus did there? He reinforced the idea that we can let go of our fears. We are Christians! What do we have to be afraid of? We are Christians! We believe in the One who has already conquered death. We are Christians! We have been baptized into Christ Jesus so we were baptized into his death. We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. That's what Paul wrote to the Church of Rome and it still is true for us today.

Because we worship a crucified and risen Christ, we don't even have to worry about death! We already know the outcome! We already know we will be united with Christ for eternity in a joyful resurrection! We will spend eternity surrounded by those we love because we worship a God who is love and love never ends. We have nothing to fear because perfect love casts out fear according to 1 John 4. We have nothing to fear, and yet we still act so afraid! We act like we could lose all of this at any

moment. We act like we are holding together some fragile glass sculpture and the slightest movement will upset what we have worked so hard to create. "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Whatever we have created here in this life will not last. We will one day join with those who are already seated around the throne of grace, so there is no need to get too excited about the things of this world.

Everything you place in front of your relationship with God is an obstacle for your worship of God alone. We're raising money for new carpet, not because it improves our relationship with God, but because it is good stewardship of the things that God has entrusted to us. A church does not depend on pews or walls or carpet. A church is more than a collection of pretty banners and musical instruments gathered inside a sacred space. A church gathered together anyplace makes that place sacred because we are the church together. We are gathered in the presence of God in a world that God created. We are gathered to clear ourselves of sin and receive God's grace and mercy. We don't need a building for that. We don't need a pulpit for that. We don't need carpet for that, but we sure need God for that! We need God to come into our fears, come into our hearts, come into our reluctance and make us bold witnesses. We need God to make us speak up. We need God to make us share the gospel in our deeds and in our actions so that our whole community hears of God's love, and it is always useful to remember that actions speak louder than words. We share God's love here in

Othello and throughout the world because we have this fire that God has put into us and we cannot do otherwise. We share the gospel in our quilts, in our potato feed and in our pancake feed. We share the gospel in our sponsorships with Compassion International, our gifts to Lutheran World Relief, our support of the Othello Food Bank and many other ways because we cannot do otherwise. Of course, if you DO feel led to talk about God with someone, I'm sure God is OK with that. St. Francis of Assisi famously said, "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words when necessary."

Like what Jeremiah said, "If we say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." We simply have to share God's love because we are Christians. We have nothing to fear, and we just can't help ourselves. Amen.