

Sunday, June 3 and Wednesday, June 6 + 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 2:23-3:6

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall, WI

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Peace. It is a word we throw around rather easily, here in church. “Peace be with you.” “And also with you.” In this context, we are expressing the hope that we are reconciled in Christ, bound together as one in Jesus. Peace in any context means reconciliation. In church, that is why we have the greeting of the peace at the beginning of our communion liturgy, so that we may all be reconciled with one another, our differences given up to God, as we prepare as one to receive Christ’s body and blood.

But peace in our world? What chance is there of that, at least while we are around?

Just listen to this paragraph from Friday’s Wall Street Journal:

President Donald Trump said his on-again, off-again summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will proceed in Singapore on June 12 as initially planned, another dramatic turn in a diplomatic saga that has veered from threats of nuclear showdown to talk about peace over a matter of days.

How can it be that we have no way of knowing whether peace or war is just around the corner? It’s because we have no idea what the truth is or where it lies. These leaders may say one thing, they may even sign an agreement, but the track record for truth-telling is not great on either side.

Peace must begin by ripping away layers of pretense and posturing to get at the truth underneath, and Jesus is here to show us a little about that.

Especially in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' entry into human history is not a harbinger of peace. [Luke 12] Rather, Jesus' entry into human history is an incursion into a world dominated by those whose only god is money and control. Jesus's mission on earth is to reclaim our lives by proclaiming the reign of God. Again and again in Mark's Gospel, as we will see as we move through this year, other reigning powers are revealed to be pretenders and predators.

For this reason, struggle is a constant motif throughout Mark. Jesus is aiming to promote a new version of reality, one that is grounded in love as the cosmic force that comes from God, that IS God, and that governs the harmony of the universe and all that is in it—from galaxies and planetary systems right down to us, you and me, and how we relate to each other.

Let's look at how Jesus' incursion into the world of the Pharisees unfolds in our Gospel reading today. The Pharisees were Jewish leaders of the time who insisted on strict observance of the law. They were commonly given to airs of superiority, and today's Gospel reading is no exception. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, they have been look for ways to stifle the voice of this troublemaker who keeps challenging their authority.

There are two incidents in today's Gospel reading. First, Jesus and his disciples are passing through a field. Hungry, perhaps, the disciples pick some grain on their way by. The Pharisees are annoyed that they are breaking Sabbath rules by traveling, and by

snacking on the grain besides. Jesus sets them straight by saying that the Sabbath exists to serve humankind, not the other way around. Later, in the synagogue, the Pharisees are furious when Jesus then heals a man with a withered hand. Jesus again challenges them, this time using their own legal language. They know perfectly well he is in the right, because in Jewish tradition saving life always overrules keeping the Sabbath.

The key element is what happens next. Look how quickly a disagreement about living within the law escalates into hostility on the Pharisees part. Jesus is correct, yet because their authority has been challenged and their plot to trap Jesus laid bare, they set out to destroy him—the Greek word here meaning “to destroy utterly” or to “cause to violently perish” -- basically, to annihilate. And simply because Jesus has restored a poor man to dignity and wholeness.

There can be no peace when a person or group distorts the facts because they are afraid of losing power. The Pharisees were exposed, and this made them furious, enough to seek Jesus’ death.

Graduates, as you prepare to go on to the life after high school that awaits you, keep truth at the heart of everything you do. Falsehoods will always catch up with you. Be prophetic voices in a world that desperately needs those. A prophetic voice is one that speaks the truth and exposes falsehood. To be a prophetic voice, you must be armed with the facts. Facts are things that actually happened. Either you witness them yourself, or you track down the facts by going to reliable sources—the media whose mission it is to

tell about things actually happened, not to make them up for some secret purpose or to talk about feelings, on what someone believes to be true. The Washington Post, the New York Times, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, the Wisconsin State Journal, our own hometown Courier: We trust these sources, because they give us news based on facts.

Graduates, open your hearts to God's love. Let your heart be good soil for truth-telling so that you may lead a life based on truth. With Christ as your leader, show the rest of us how Jesus wants us to live. Follow him, he who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Amen.