

This Week's Thoughts For Study

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday

“You’re Nobody Till Somebody loves You”

Every time I picked up a newspaper or listened to the news this week, I was confronted by some seemingly pointless act or crime committed somewhere in our nation, some act of inhumanity. and my blood pressure would go up. I've grown somewhat immune to irrationality, to acts which are outside the normal motivations we have come to expect – fear, greed, anger, revenge, to name a few. More and more things seem to defy rational explanation. A young woman, in her teens, takes her baby and abandons it in a field because she didn't want her father to know he was pregnant. Another man is killed (and an innocent bystander wounded) as someone else attempts to enter the White House grounds to do violence. And now the looting and burning of Jewish and Muslim owned businesses by people, young and old, of either race, to protest the war in Iran and Lebanon, and it goes on. Attempts to explain such seemingly irrational behavior almost invariably end up considering the core components of our personalities, who and what we are before education or politics or economics. What the psychologist Maslow referred to as our “Hierarchy of Needs”. The basic need of every individual to feel security; to feel a part of some group or family; to feel a sense of worth and value; to feel, if you will, loved. To the degree that these core needs are unmet, we are told, the individual develops with a warped or twisted personality. Putting it another way, who or what we are is not ultimately dependent on wealth, position, or power but rather on the basic relationships we have known since the earliest days of our childhood. In the words of a once popular song, “You’re nobody till somebody loves you, you’re nobody till somebody cares.” Growing up without feeling loved, valued, or a part of some caring group leaves us stunted in the most elemental areas. This intriguing thought comes into clear focus in the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, his last recorded appearance to the disciples before ascending into heaven.

The disciples have gone away, perhaps even on retreat, for meditation, prayer, safety from the Jews. We don't know all the reasons nor are we sure where they went, but wherever it was, Jesus appears.

It's important to note that some worship, some doubt, for they are still men struggling with the enormity of what has happened to them, around them, in them. Jesus appears and gives to them “The Great Commission”; “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Not an explanation of all that happened; not a reproof for their struggles of faith; not even a reassuring “pep talk”; just the charge to go out and share the love of God with a twisted world.

The message of the Bible, of the Gospels, hopefully of the church, is a message of love abroad in the world; love seeking the lost, forlorn, and hopeless and loving them back to life. All of scripture testifies that God created us in love: made us stewards of all creation possessed of health and security, and most of all of innocence. We threw that away with sin! God loved us into life again with the gift of his son, sacrificed on the cross! Loved us out of the death of sin, out of hopelessness, and gave to us again the hope of eternal life. Where our sins were set behind us, our pasts forgotten, our relationship as the beloved children of God reestablished! Each of us was brought into that relationship with him by the loving intercession of some person or persons who loved us into fellowship, into believing, into the church! We are Christians today because someone cared enough to teach us, invite us, witness to us. And now Jesus sends us forth to love others as we have been loved, as he first loved us.

The great commission is the meaning, the reason for the existence of the church, the justification for each of us coming together in worship, building and deepening our relationship with God, calling ourselves followers of Christ! If we believe that God believes in us; that he believed in us enough to love us into the kingdom, then the only way to truly share the “Good News” of the Gospel and of the kingdom is to love someone into it in return.

These are troubled times, the pandemic, the economy, failing businesses and unemployment, and now festering racial divide brought to a boil. Around you - at work, at play, in your neighborhoods, are the forgotten, the abandoned, the hopeless of this world (however successful they might seem). You know who they are even if you don't quite know what the problem is or what is wrong. These lost souls are adrift, and they won't be won, their fractured psyches can't be healed, by condemnation, fear of judgment, or by guilt. The conflict in the Middle East will never be over while it remains a contest of who can inflict the greatest damage. Crime won't cease to be a problem because we finally build enough prisons. People won't ever begin to selflessly care for each other, regardless of color, creed or gender because of smooth words, great theories, or even re-education. Those lost souls are won by being taught the saving love of God by those who have already experienced it, by each of us!

The greatest witness you make is not the scripture you quote or even the explanation you give; it is the relationship in which you share love. To the man or woman whom the world despises because they are poor, powerless, alone. To the child that no one has time for; not to teach, not to play ball with, nor to love. To the person or persons who lives trapped in the mistakes and regrets of the past, which no one ever sees beyond. Perhaps most significantly, to the person who has hurt you the most, who you have the most reason to dislike or hate.

So, I ask you, "Who have you loved into the kingdom? Who attends our church, or any church, because of your influence? Who has seen the love of Christ in you and so is brought back from the brink of despair to receive new hope? "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (including this one) and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

For the Week Ahead

Focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.

Think about the things in life you are truly afraid of; and then ask yourself if these same fears don't afflict those protesting around our nation (protesting, not looting).

Ask yourself what you have done, unwittingly, to foster division, and then consider what you can do to heal.

Pray for God's grace to overcome our fears and cause us to come together in love, care, and understanding.

Pray without ceasing!