

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Robert Goldstein
February 5th, 2017

We are living in a somewhat new era in our country and in the world. I confess I am not warming up to its nationalistic bravado. In my opinion it is foolishness. I want Christian wisdom in dealing with it.

Clout, wealth by bullying, and rattling sabers represents a philosophy of power that has once again overtaken Washington. We cannot avoid it, because we live in our nation which we love. I want to say something in Christ, from Christ, to you that is marked with some sort of wisdom.

So, what do we do? We cannot run away and establish a “pure” community separate from this world, or going in denial. How can I advise you as a pastor of the Church? Do I have any wisdom?

Many of you have to go to work tomorrow and this new era may affect your job in finance, the military, in industry, in education, and in exposing your children to this bullying approach to life. It may not be all negative, but it is certainly shaping up that way. We need Christian wisdom.

How are we to live in these new circumstances? How can we be Jesus’ salt in this situation instead of over-salty criticism that people will stop listening to us, or salt-less submission to the flow of things? How can we provide the light of Christ in these times? Shall we appear in a self-righteous overbearing light to the world or a dimming despair? The pulpit is the place to ask these questions. but it is also the place to give faithful responses.

A member of one of one of the congregations I served posted on Facebook a video calling for us to support VP Pence to pray for the healing of the nation. I responded that I couldn’t pray with him because what he means by “healing” sounds scary. Further, I added that this man as governor of Indiana diverted AIDS care and education funds to support gay conversion therapy.

Was I salt and light?

My former parishioner responded, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” She was right, I was wrong. My salt had become too salty. My light was glaring and blinding. I had no wisdom. I need God’s wisdom as do you.

St. Paul offers the sustenance of the Word to our dilemmas. In the Corinthians’ reading this morning, Paul came to Corinth “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” I pray that you and I do not assume to know everything. I believe we come in fear and trembling as we seek God’s guidance in this new era.

My speech and my proclamation are not to be plausible words of worldly wisdom, but may they be, as Paul said, a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God....”

Paul also says, “It is not a wisdom of this age we should seek, or of the rulers of this age, who come and go. He also says that “among the mature we do speak wisdom; we speak God’s wisdom: what God has prepared for those who love him.”

We are brothers and sisters of Christ, in Christ, through our baptism. The wisdom we grasp is what it means to be in Christ. This wisdom is a crucified wisdom –a crucifixion and resurrection that reminds us we cannot fix all the world, only God can. Wisdom means God’s Holy Spirit works through our hands, minds, hearts and mouths to use our gifts to meet human needs.

In our time, we have seen presidents who humbly understood the power of the crucified and resurrected Christ. We have sensed it in them by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Paul said, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” This is the knowledge that is God’s wisdom. The Christian church seeks out the so-called “losers”, the “deplorables”, the poor and the powerless; the foreigner and the immigrant. Are you offended with this wisdom of God?

While God has given you natural ambition, God’s wisdom reminds you that you also have the Holy Spirit within your heart, who has given you gifts to love the so-called losers in this world.

The crucifixion revealed very painfully that God’s power does not abide in America First, or

Russia First, or China First. God's power is not Washington power. God's power is the free gift of God's love in our hearts and in our community. We cannot live this out alone, but through Christ, through the Holy Spirit in us, and through this community of hope. We are empowered, in this new era, to dare to care for the immigrants, the Muslims, the losers.

This is the paradoxical power. In our weakness, the Holy Spirit gives us power that loves from the bottom –not from the top. Empires come and go. Administrations come and go, but God's wisdom reminds us we are here to get rich in works of love. Does this sound foolish to you?

We are a crucifixion and resurrection people. We see ourselves and our nation through the cross of Christ. That cross empties us of our pretensions. That cross invites us to be like Jesus crucified: totally left to God's power alone. God resurrected Jesus, and through that resurrection, the power of God was given to us through our baptism to send us on humble service and love of all the losers.

But we live by grace through faith to love all our neighbors. Only by God's grace alone. Hard, but it is wise indeed. God's wisdom. Amen