

“Reconciling in Christ” Sunday  
Third Sunday After Pentecost  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
The Rev. Jason S. Glombicki  
June 30, 2019

In today’s gospel, James and John asked, “Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54) The question was a visceral human respond. It embodied the law of retaliation which demands “an eye for an eye” or a “tooth for a tooth.” It says, if you’re going to reject me, be rude to me, or embarrass me, then you best watch out because you’re going to be eviscerated. And, Jesus didn’t debate their ability to carry out such a response. I’m sure Jesus knew the long tradition of Samaritans treating Jewish pilgrims poorly. Jesus also experienced how humanity could bring about division and devour a community with hate and fear. So, instead, Jesus quickly disapproved of the disciples’ response and indicated that they should examine their own commitments to works of transformation.

With the vandalism and theft that plagued our church over the last couple of weeks, it’d be natural for us to determine who did it and then, tear apart their home, or spray paint a message of hate on their property, or have them locked away. That is the law of retaliation, after all. Yet, in today’s gospel, Jesus teaches the way of non-retaliation so as to deepen a commitment to life-giving work. He doesn’t say to roll over and take it, but instead, Jesus uses the interaction with three potential followers to help them recommit to the journey toward justice and life. We learn that the journey will not be comfortable, is not to be put off, and is not for passive engagement. The journey towards justice is now. The journey to love is uncomfortable. The journey towards a transformed society requires constant vigilance.

You see, Jesus's journey was not a vacation trip, it wasn't a visit, in fact, a "journey" is how the gospel of Luke talks about what it means to truly live. It's a journey where we take pitstops to learn about trusting in God's provisions, namely that God has provided for all our needs today, tomorrow, and forever. After those pitstops, we are fueled for our journey to embody radical generosity with our time, our money, and our possessions. It's the fuel that will prevent us from falling prey to the greed that will destroy life (Luke 12:13-21). It's the energy that will allow us to see the unexpected landscape of God's city where the largest house, the best job, and most fashionable items mean nothing; rather, in this new landscape we find God's goodness is, specifically, for the poor, the marginalized, the rejected, and the feared. You see, in Luke, the journey's final destination is discovered when we fully embody God's vision for justice, love and peace.

And, like today's disciples, we've learned that this journey is hard and requires active vigilance. Just because we are a nation formed by immigrants escaping persecution does not mean that we could never persecute those seeking safety. Just because we had a black president doesn't mean people of color are not treated unfairly and with deeper scrutiny. Just because 8 in 10 Americans believe that climate change is causing extreme weather doesn't mean that we will seriously respond to the challenges ahead.

And, for me, I've learned that the hard way. You see, while gay marriage was legalized in all 50 states, that didn't stop a man as I passed by him on a sidewalk from screaming at me to get away from him because I am a fee-git (I censored that for the kids). Or, while I saw the Pride displays in stores beckoning me to celebrate my full self, that didn't stop our transgender flag from being erased with a giant black "X" and the good image of queer people to be tarnished with claims that we take advantage of children. Or, while well-meaning people who support the queer

community expressed sorrow for our plight, that didn't stop them from discounting the minority experience by blaming troubled youth or drunk people for defacing another's property.

But, that's how the world works. You and I, we all do it. We look at the victim and shame them for wearing such a short skirt that clearly "asked for" sexual advances. Or, we blame the person of color who shouldn't have moved so quickly to get license and registration from the glovebox. Or, we blame a family who shouldn't have traveled so far with a young child as the reason why they floating face down in the river. You see, instead of blaming the ways we socialize people around sex, or the ways we've breed responses of fear to black men, or the ways we've blame the victims of violence instead of decades of unruly policies that created this crisis, we have turned around and called down fire from heaven to consume and burn all in our pathway. We have said, time and again, just wait one second because I've got something more important to do than to work for justice and peace.

But, today, Jesus gives us another way. It's a way that shows resistance without violence. It's a way that acknowledges the difficulty of working for justice. It's a way that requires us to recognize our privilege as straight, or white, or male, or U.S. citizen, or Wicker Parkian, or cis-gendered, or able-bodied, or English-speaking. It's a way that takes a "not yet" and turns it into a "right now." It's a way that moves us into enacting a loving world by being the love we want to see.

That is what I've learned this week, namely that while God is certainly found in grand gestures and mountain-top experiences, God is also found in the short e-mail expressing love, in the phone call asking "how are you doing," in packages of rainbow flags sent to the church, in Pride Parade marchers, and in our presence together here

and now. God is not dead, rather God is alive in you and me. God dwells in the many colors we show, in the loving actions we share, and in the ways we bear our full selves.

That my friends, is what we celebrate this day. It's a day where we acknowledge that we are all have similar fears, similar needs, similar desires, and similar dreams. It's the day where we realize that calling down fire will do nothing more than burn us all. So, the joy of the day is to be reminded that we are all image-bearers of God's persona. While some may be a little gayer and others a bit straighter, while some paint with color and others are more neutral, no matter how we present or identify we are all embodied with God's image. We have been given that gift of love, and we are sent into the world to recognize that image of God in everyone we meet and to be bear God's image in our love towards all people. Today, we give thanks for the gift, for God's gift. Amen.