

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

The Rev. Kwame Pitts

August 11, 2019

*Grace and peace to you, my sisters, brothers and siblings in Christ, in love, in faith and in the fight towards transformative gospel rooted, holy spirit filled justice, that impacts all of those victimized by oppression, marginalization and violated because of the systems and the systemic racism that has invaded and impacted the ways in which we should intentionally without question, follow Jesus Christ. Jesus, who calls to us to love one another as creator and as the risen one loves us, Jesus, modeling how to express righteous rage to flip over tables disrupt the toxicity of the empire that seeps into the hands of church leaders, staining everything they touch and to dismantle the cycles of hatred so that we, become grace-giving mercy filled communities. Amen.*

Good morning, Wicker Park. I am thankful to be among you once more, to share a Word from the Triune God, to commensurate, in our common fears, worries and yes, even anger. To gather at the table, to be fed, forgiven and then, to actually do the work that Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord left for us. That's what it means, in that spiritual to keep our lamps trimmed and burning, because there is still a fight before us.

Jesus knew things were about to get beyond messy. Because we still cannot grasp that when Jesus called for us to go and make disciples, he didn't mean grow our church membership so we could have country club activities and a shiny new organ.

Jesus meant for us to take the excesses in our lives, bring it to the places we gather, and feed and care for those who have been shut out of abundance when sustainability is theirs' by right, simply because they too, are beloved of God.

Jesus knew humanity's existence was about to be severely broken because we are too strung out on what the Empire has been pushing into our very being. This idea, that the only way to glory is by selling each other out, creating systems of inequality, divisiveness. We manipulate the Word, so that then the Creator is fashioned into our ideals, our standards, and that we are the receivers of God's reward as one percent-ers.

Jesus came, because humanity is imperfect. No, instead, I think humanity, and in this context, Christians, that with access to power, with Christianity often seen as the religion of the state or claimed as the core of a nation Christians, take on the moniker, of favored and spoiled.

Ironically, when you point out in these Scriptures what the Creator expects of us continuing the flow of divine harmony, of mirroring what prophets, teachers, with what Jesus spoke to the disciples the reality that everything in this life, does not belong to us that we are called to be generous welcoming, sometimes, the world, and even us experiences the ugly part of those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, they respond in defiance throwing tantrums on a massive scale, using policies to deport people en mass, while whitewashing various cultures.

As a form of amusement there are unfortunately those, who when Jesus says, "Follow me," their response is they like their status of power, they are above and beyond everyone else, they are safe, delusional in thinking that these tangible things will keep them free from experiencing life even with all its difficulties so all of the things that matter, they hoard and store up treasures in the form of gated communities, deforestation of lands turned into status symbols, of opulent houses, investing in stocks instead of people, robbing Creation of life, especially our oceans and seas, so that they can feast and be filled. That, that is where their bloated hearts lie.

I joined over a thousand or so Lutherans. We gathered to do the work of the wider expression of the Church, of the ELCA. And sometimes even that work, makes a soul weary, and the lamps that are our souls are dying embers barely recognizable.

Yes, our Church did indeed speak to the issues of white supremacy and racism that have been an issue inside our walls by a Declaration of Apology to Peoples of African Descent, to my Ancestors, and we, their descendants, that the ELCA has been complicit in its silence, of not speaking clearly, boldly about these grievous sins, that the wider breath of the Church, has ignored Jesus's one commandment of loving one another regardless of who we are, our culture, or our language and history.

Yes, the ELCA has declared itself, a Sanctuary Denomination, fighting and working towards being that safe and sacred space for those of our siblings, who are fleeing violence and persecution, even when that persecution is coming from the same country that claims this is a place where the tired, poor masses can rest and be free.

And yes, the ELCA has adopted a strategy towards authentic diversity in this Church, so that those of us who are Persons of Many Descent, who love beautifully and differently, are uplifted as leaders, whose presence is valued and whose witness and testimony is sorely needed.

But, these social statements and declaration this, public display of unity in front of company, who is observing and watching and hoping that we collectively keep our word, these words on paper do not end the problems we tackle daily. As people of faith that does not mean, we shift to being careless, banking on this five minutes of feel good fame moment that we hope will turn into a PR campaign. And suddenly, just because we have put on a pristine mask, that people will flood into these church buildings and join us, because we have made our Words almost perfect and blameless.

The mistake of the wider expression of the church as institution is that they allow their lamps, their fire, their drive to go out simply because they feel they have done enough.

We passed a [resolution](#), regarding a Feast Day of Repentance regarding the Emmanuel 9. There are people in this church, who think we will create the liturgy, they will gather on June 17<sup>th</sup>, they will lament and pray, and that will be it.

This Church, the ELCA, refused to sign onto the Poor People's Campaign. Oh, they don't know!

When I have been among you, and I do the words of institution, I tell you, now that you have been fed, LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH. DO SOMETHING.

We cannot get weary, when the wider Church allows those lights to flicker and die; we cannot get weary, when people are afraid to do the work, BECAUSE THEY HAVE SEEN OUR LAMPS BURNING, BECAUSE WE ARE SUPPOSED TO REVERBERATE THE HOPE that Jesus Christ gave us all, when He GAVE HIS LIFE!

And because He gave of Himself, so that we would always be eternally bonded to the Creator God, Dear Church, There is WORK to be done. Jesus prayed, taught and then did the work so, why is the Church always against us doing the same?

We gather and pray before we march, before we express our righteous rage, before we advocate for ALL, and not this world's chosen few?

We are to keep our lamps trimmed and burning, but not as slaves. We are not slaves. Slavery is mired in violence, degradation and disrespect for our lives.

As a Pastor in this Church, as your Sister in Christ, this is not how God sees us; therefore, we as humanity should have never and should never treat one another as less than, as 3/5ths of a human being.

When our lamps are flickering in danger of going out, that is when we, Children of God, because of the love poured into our lamps, we should in turn, fill up one another's lamps.

Thanks be to God.