

Jesus shows us the way forward

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This is All Saints a service where we honor and remember all those who have gone before us. This is also the traditional day where we turn in our pledge cards. In past years this sermon has often featured a list of all the great things this parish has done in the past and in the present Last week David and Sid did a wonderful job telling you all the reasons why we need your support again. However, this year is not like other years.

We are faced with division that has many people in this country concerned, upset, even frightened. At the Wednesday night bible study one person remarked that they had gone to their doctor for a checkup and was asked, "Have you experienced any signs of depression over the past few months?" Their answer was, "Well other than my feelings about the election no, I'm fine." The nurse said, "You will not believe how often I'm hearing that right now." I have friends who do pastoral counseling and their phone is ringing off the hook with people who just cannot handle the current situation, which is causing PTSD like symptoms in many. That is why I am offering the post election prayer service at 8:00 p.m. on election night.

However our gospel this morning for All Saints does in fact offer some help and some hope. Now to move forward I have to overcome one of those problems that we have in the lectionary and that is the gospel reading only presents a small portion of Jesus' teaching so I would like to read you the rest of this passage for this completes Jesus' thoughts on the matter of how we live in community.

Luke 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Have you ever wondered why we put up monuments and fight about posting the 10 commandments, but nobody ever wants to post the Beatitudes? Maybe this is because the 10 commandments are much easier to understand and to follow. Maybe it is because this was a covenant, a relationship with God and others based on actions and

a quid pro quo understanding of how God works. By that I mean you do X and the other person or God responds by doing Y. The 10 commandments are pretty simple to understand and not really that hard to follow.

The Beatitudes and this teaching of Jesus is much harder to understand and even harder to live. For they are more about relationship than rule following. David Brooks in a wonderful editorial referred to the writings of Martin Buber. Now I know there are some of you who may balk at my quoting a NY Times writer, but he is a moderate voice or at least used to be considered a moderate voice. He is however, a man of deep faith committed to his Roman Catholic ties.

What he was referring to was something that I have also referenced but it is important and ties into the challenge Jesus has presented us today. Buber speaks of our relationship with God needing to move beyond an I-It relationship. One of subject and object and instead look at it as I-Thou of a more intimate relationship where we move beyond ever interaction being one of commerce. He called for us to consider breaking down the barriers that have formed by moving away from the I-It to an I-Thou in our personal relationships. This honors the other person

Nothing will change until we move past this us/them duality. We are all us we have to be and I can tell you the world is watching and wondering what is wrong with us. Where is to become of that compassionate country who comes in to help in times of trouble is one thing I have read and heard? One of our members who just returned from an overseas trip said she got tired of trying to explain what is going on to folks in and from other countries.

In his Friday meditation, which is part of a series on the Cosmic Christ Richard Rohr writes:

“We see this in our current political climate in America and much of the world. The United States has suffered eight years of nonstop gridlock and opposition to any creative governance. It mirrors Newton’s Third Law of Motion that “every action elicits an equal and opposite reaction.” Today many people are reverting to tribal thinking, denial, fear, and hatred, rather than turning to compassionate, creative solutions to real challenges of poverty, climate change, and the many worldwide forms of injustice.”¹

Richard’s comments apply to all sides in the current mess that we are in. Jesus in this sermon of which our passage today is a part is telling us how to move forward as a community and moving forward as a community is essential to changing what is happening. We again have to find our sense of community and we cannot do that as long as we lobbing threats and hate at each other. We have to get past us and them dualistic thinking and realize what God knows and Jesus taught. We are all beloved children of God.

¹<http://email.cac.org/t/ViewEmail/d/DB8C9290C7E51FA1/BBC62F1EC1C6D196C68C6A341B5D209E>

This also means none of us can walk away and say, I have no need of you. Paul writes about this when he says can the hand say to the foot I have no need of you. For better or worse we are in this all together.

This brought to mind an old Hassidic tale. The story is about a young man who asked his rabbi why it was important to be part of a community. The rabbi pulled a partially burned log from the fire and set it aside. In just a few seconds the flame went out and the log stopped burning. He then returned the log to the fire and it instantly burst back into flame. The rabbi said, "You see my son when you are removed from community, your flame will go out. It is only in a gathered community that we can burn with the flame of faith."

So now more than ever we need each other and we need to walk together as Jesus teaches in our gospel. We need to take seriously the baptismal promises we renewed last week at the baptism especially the one about respecting the dignity of every human being.

These are challenging times and require bold action and Jesus shows us exactly what we must do. The question is do we have the courage, do you have the courage to step across the divide from both sides and heal our country.