

Sermon: October 18, 2018  
"The power of KINDNESS and a THANK-YOU"

Lots of thoughts running through my "humble brain" this morning. It is REFORMATION SUNDAY ... which in "Lutheran circles" is supposed to be a big deal ... or, at least, it used to be. Going back to the 1500's ----- a young Catholic priest wants to make some changes. Martin Luther loved his church ... never wanted to start a new one ... just wanted to "breathe new life" into a church that had "lost its way." He wants the church to be truer to the seeds Jesus had planted so long ago.

I think of the words in the gospel today: SO IF THE SON MAKES YOU FREE, YOU WILL BE FREE INDEED. To me ... spiritual freedom, religious freedom, the freedom our country is supposed to stand for ----- this is the most precious and sacred of gifts. And ... when the church stands in the way of this --- well, we need to make some changes.

I come here this morning ... walk with my wonder-dog Harley out back ... waiting for the sunrise. I come back into the church, to the sound of perking coffee. So thankful for the courage of people like Martin Luther ... who stand up to those who don't want religion to be a beacon of freedom. I'm reminded: this is what we are about ----- the freedom to "be" ...the freedom to "accept our own humanity" ... to be saint and sinner, at the same time. The freedom to walk in here and know there is a "higher power" embracing us ... yes, a "higher power" we call by many names.

We all are thinking this morning of a synagogue in Pittsburg: the "Tree of life." People gather ... and suddenly their innocence is invaded. Our roots are in the Jewish tradition. I think of Jesus --- his words, his deeds, the way he walks and carries himself. Jesus never meant to start a "new religion." He was a student of the Old Testament ... he cherished the temple. He just wanted people "to be set free" ... from the inside out. He didn't want folks to be paralyzed by their shortcomings or the barriers dividing them. He wants us to be united in our diversity.

It's so ironic. Jesus' kindness, gentleness, humility, and message of forgiveness ----- this all caused some people to want to get rid of him. You know? ..... there are just some people in this world who can't stand goodness and peace. So --- they lash-out. Jesus' death reminds us ..... life isn't pretty, at times. What has happened in Pittsburg points us to the risk of freedom, and the courage it takes to stand up for what is good and just.

This morning I'm a bit confused. So much going on in the world ... in your life and mine. Yesterday I'm in the parking garage at Christ Hospital --- 6<sup>th</sup> floor. I take a moment and look out over the village of Oak Lawn. Kudos to Christ Hospital ----- they don't charge for parking!@@!! I see all the traffic ... people driving back-and-forth. People walking ... in a hurry. Weary souls getting out of their cars in a hospital parking lot ---- to visit a loved one. Everyone has a destination ... everyone has a journey. All God's children ... coming and going. Somehow ... somehow ... in the middle of all this: IT'S WHERE GOD LIVES. THIS IS WHERE GOD SPEAKS (silently) ... and EMBRACES US.

For some reason this morning ... I click onto FACEBOOK. There is a post from Frankie. So often we talk about her 20-year battle with cancer and all kinds of health issues. The "record number" of MRI'S and surgeries. She shares these words:  
*"There is absolutely nothing I could say to sum up my extreme gratitude for all the prayers, love, and support that have poured into my life the last several weeks from my All Saints family. Don't put the word out that I needed help, and within minutes, the troops rallied and my life improved.*

*I just wanted you to know that if you called, stopped by or even said a silent prayer, I felt every good wish, and it got me through one of the toughest weeks of my life. Things are in place now. I have transportation arranged. Doctor appointments in order, and a fresh fire in me to win yet one more battle. Love you all for everything you have done."*

That's it!@!! That's religion and the church and being "the body of Christ."  
Some 2000+ years ago ... a humble carpenter came out of the woods to be baptized ... and began a ministry lasting only 3 years. Yet his "walk" continues to change lives today.  
Yes, we need some "reformation" ... we need to cut-through the "gunk" and hold onto the simplicity and gentle power of his message.

When something happens like what has gone down in Pittsburg ... we need to take our anger and frustration and turn it into a "random act of kindness." Reminding others that true power lies inside the heart-and-souls of peacemakers and caregivers. In people like Frankie and Linda and Vern and Karen ..... who don't let the unfairness of life get in the way of walking in shoes of courage and hope and faith.

Oh, by the way ----- I remember talking about my preaching professor ... who, with a smile, reminded me: "if you can't say it in 10 minutes ... don't punish people with your ignorance."  
Well ---- after church ... one of you emails me ... reminding me of the words of George Burns who said:

*The secret to a good sermon is: \*have a good beginning \*have a good ending  
\*and make sure they are close together.*

The secret to a good life?  
Have a good beginning ... filled with love and hope.  
Have a good ending ... yes, a "good-bye" laced with dignity and grace.  
And hopefully ----- our beginning and ending aren't "too close" together.  
But even if they are ... whatever is "in-between" ...  
hopefully there is room for a "love bucket" or two ... and a few glimpses of the SUNRISE.

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