

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

James 5: 13-20

Psalms 19: 7-14

Mark 9: 38-50

Sermon September 26th, 2021

Peace Be with You

A few years into my first call I was sitting in a Tim Hortons in Saskatoon visiting with a parishioner when a woman came up to me. I was wearing my clerical collar at the time. She asked me if I was a Catholic priest. I said “no. I am a Lutheran pastor.” She responded by saying, “Oh your Lutheran. Are you one of the bad Lutherans or the good Lutherans?” I said to her, “depends who is asking.”

Since the church came into being we have seen tensions between different communities within Christianity. Paul’s letters in the New Testament of the Bible contain a lot of advice to the Christian communities in Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Rome in how to deal with these tensions. Our creedal statements were formulated out of these tensions, as Christians tried to find common ground in their beliefs about who Jesus was. Years later, the Reformation (**Image**) led to a massive division between Christians over issues around specific religious practices, which continues to impact Christian unity today.

Unfortunately, we continue to see divisions as we try to deal with contentious issues within our community. Sometimes in my ecumenical work it can feel like unity is just a pipe dream, as so many of us continue to focus on the differences between each other.

We see similar issues within interfaith circles. I meet a lot of people from different faith traditions who think their religion is the true religion and everyone else’s religion is false. Some fringe groups within religious traditions even resort to violence or abusive language to push their religion on someone else (**Image**). Unfortunately, we see these fringe groups in every religious community. Some get more media attention than others, but every ideology or belief system is vulnerable to being manipulated by someone to gain power and control over others.

This doesn’t mean religion in itself is bad. Unfortunately, some people use religion in unhealthy ways to hurt others.

That being said, in the secular world, it isn’t much different though some people will try and argue that point. We see political strife (**Image**). We see organizational strife as different organizations argue and compete with one another instead of finding ways to work together. We see this both in the for-profit organizations, and in the not-for-profit organizations. People who volunteer or are hired by these organizations come with beliefs and ideologies on how best to promote their organizations. On how best to help

others. Sometimes their beliefs and ideologies will clash with one another leading to conflict.

The healthy organizations are able to work through their conflicts building bridges to walk on together. Unhealthy organizations are less able to find those things they share in common. Leading to division, and a greater neglect of those people in need.

Throughout my whole ministry I have worked with community networks, interfaith groups, ecumenical groups, and unfortunately have seen too much of this division and conflict happening in our communities. This division and conflict make it much more difficult for us to create a community that welcomes Jesus' invitation for us to live in peace with one another. So that we can focus our attention on healing people instead of hurting people.

Well, in our gospel this morning, the disciples come to Jesus, angry and anxious about this person who is healing people in Jesus' name. And are angry at the fact that he isn't a disciple.

Now, if they saw this person hurting someone in Jesus' name I could understand where their anger and anxiety are coming from. But this person is healing someone in Jesus' name. Let me say this one more time. This person is healing someone in Jesus' name.

Yeah! I can totally see Jesus walk up to this person and say, "don't you go healing anymore people now. How can you be so selfish?" On second thought. No, I can't.

As over the top out of this world the disciple's complaint might sound. It is actually a complaint I hear often from people. Organizations who share a common vision to help others not getting along with each other. Fighting over how best to help people instead of working together to help people.

I hear a lot of people talk these days about how divisive we are, but I argue that we are more aware of the divisions now, because of social media (**Image**). Unfortunately, for most of our history we have had to deal with the consequences of not working well together.

In response to the disciple's complaint, Jesus challenges them to see that this person is doing something good. This person is healing someone in his name. Doesn't matter if this person is one of the disciples. This person is healing someone. That is what matters. If this person shares a similar vision to Jesus, then surely this person isn't against Jesus and his disciples, or against the vision they are trying to promote.

Jesus goes on to invite them to live in peace with one another. Don't squabble over all these things. Instead, find common ground to stand on with each other (**Image**).

Because, if you can come together to help those in need you will be able to do so much more.

As I shared earlier, I have worked in ecumenical communities, interfaith communities, and even in organizational communities. And I am going to tell you a big secret that I don't think to many people are aware of. Though we see divisions, hate, conflict, throughout human history. We also see communities of people living in unity. Loving one another. Working together for the common good. Unfortunately, what has access to television or our computer screen is often the drama in the world. Not so much the good things happening in our world.

On the ground level I see community organizations coming together finding what they have in common and sharing resources with each other. So that they are able to do more to help people in need in their communities. Instead, of perceiving their differences in a negative light. They complement each other with their different approaches to helping people.

I see faith organizations coming together finding what they have in common and sharing resources with each other (**Image**). During the last annual clothing give away we hosted, we had eight different faith and ecumenical groups coming together to share their resources to help almost 300 people in need in our community.

One Sunday a month a group of us Christians and Muslims come together to share in our scriptures of different characters who are both in the Bible and in the Qur'an. I have been working in Muslim-Christian dialogue for almost twenty years and this study continues to amaze me in how much our scriptures have in common.

I try and encourage people to see that the common ground is there between us if we are willing to see it.

During Harry's funeral a few years back, I witnessed a profound joy as Catholics and Lutherans came together to worship. To participate in communion together. To reflect the connections we built with one another during the ministries we did together during the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Our Anglican Lutheran Full Communion partnership is a unique relationship in our world. Where two major denominations chose to come together in so many ways including being able to call pastors to serve in each other's churches.

As much as we are seeing divisions and conflict in our communities, there are people within religious, ecumenical, and organizational circles coming together to build bridges of unity and peace.

Jesus invites us to live in peace with one another. To heal people together. To feed and clothe people together (**Image**). To comfort people together. To dialogue with each other. Growing in relationship with one another. To learn from each other. To love people together.

Jesus comes into our lives to give us peace. To help us see where God's love is working in the lives, of not only us, Christ's disciples, but also in everyone else around us. To help us see that a part of being hospitable to others is being able to see the hospitality in others.

Let us pray, harmonious God, grant us patience, compassion, wisdom, understanding, so that we can work together to create a community where we live in peace with one another. Where there is violence, division, conflict, heal us. Where there is love and unity between us, motivate us to heal, feed, clothe, comfort, and love those in our communities. **Amen.**

© copyright, 2021, Wallace Bornhuse. All rights reserved.