

Let Your Life Speak Isaiah 42:1-9
November 2022

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

SLIDE 1 – Clip art of Christ Crucified

The message of Christianity is of salvation based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It has always been a puzzle, first to the early followers on up to the present. It remains foolishness and counter to the culture, counter to those whose major way of being is holding power over others. But to those who are being called into Christ's love, it is life! For the Apostle Paul, the cross, the death and resurrection of Christ is both deep divine wisdom and a miraculous display of divine love for the world and all humanity. To embody this love is everything!

SLIDE 2 – Friendship with Cloris

The vision of the church is to embody the divine love shown in Christ. To be joined to Christ in baptism, to follow Christ through the journey of one's days, and to be Christ for the other is to let your life speak. It is wonderful when all things work together for good and the people let their life speak with kindness, friendship, and service.

Today with two bible readings we will reflect on the nature of Christ's love and servanthood. The task of the preacher, according to David Lose and other theologians, is to tell the truth twice: first, in terms of our distance from God's vision of life for us, and second, of God's work to bridge the gap while raising us to that life. If we truly live this life we will find we are in need of being restored. In the New Testament bible reading of 1st Corinthians, the great foolishness is of the Corinthians putting on airs, being enthralled with their own importance, their wisdom, strength, knowledge, and so on. The first truth is that they are self-impressed people.

The second truth is that God chose what is foolish to shame the wise. God chose the cross, a symbol of humiliation of the weak, to reduce to nothing things that are. Mary Hinkle Shore says of this passage: God's choice of the Corinthians and of the cross merge until each of them helps to make sense of the other, and both of them look to be in character for God.

SLIDE 3 – Staff Planning in 2019

This is a work of the people of faith, to overcome egos and instead focus on furthering the kingdom of God. I told the Congregational Council this week that my ministry among you has been a servant type of ministry with playfulness and collaboration leading the way. I have rejoiced when people work together in the mission of being a fountain of life for all who gather here. This picture was taken on a bright day as we planned for the 2019-2020 season which was upended by the pandemic. Pictures of Zoom meetings are not as beautiful. Our collaborative work continued in March 2020 but it felt like survival mode rather than life giving from our perspective as planners. And yet for you, the people of the congregation, what you saw and received was meaningful, well-done, and formative. We found the congregation could be the Body of Christ in a new dimension.

SLIDE 4 - Humility

The African concept of Ubuntu teaches us, our humanity is bound to the humanity of others, and we can only be fully human together. You cannot exist as a human being in isolation. This concept of interconnectedness is in harmony with St. John's mission statement where the people gather to be life for each other and compassion for the world, and Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians of a force that holds the universe together is no other than a love which joyfully bears the burdens of others.

SLIDE 5 – Communion Visit with Jean

God chooses the outsider often to be an agent of grace. God tells us to invite into our fellowships people of diverse character. The sense in the Old Testament bible reading speaks to this understanding. God is drawn to those without sight or pathways, to those imprisoned, and the poor. Later in Corinthians Paul will echo this word of solidarity. To say to the person struggling whether it is mental illness, poverty, addiction or injustice, "I have no need of you," and then to warehouse that person in prison or institutions or places which lack freedom and personal agency is to deny the image of God dwelling within that one. God gives preferential treatment to the vulnerable.

SLIDE 6 – Children's Time

God chooses and a people of faith are formed. In the scriptures we read that God has chosen the people of Israel in the book of Isaiah to be the Servant of God.

They are a small community in a big world. Similarly today the Church is The Servant acting as the voice and the presence of grace and mercy and provision in the community. The Church embodies love for each other and the world.

SLIDE 7 – Trunk of Treat

We learn this little by little as we go along the way and work on defining our selves. As the tagline for St. John's Christian Preschool says, "We learn a lot, have some fun, and share God's love!" The robust Christian educational focus of St. John's from the Preschool to Sunday School to Confirmation to Adult Ed strives to form Christian identity. But education alone will not save us. Life in the spirit is more than learning and study. Life in the spirit is holistic.

SLIDE 8 – Lynx fan

This is just a reminder that since I grew up in Minnesota and have lived in Wisconsin for 24 years that I have tried to stay out of the emotional trap of being seen as either of Viking or Packer fan. I know a lot about football but I am a Minnesota Lynx fan.

SLIDE 9 – Baptism

Life in the Spirit is holistic. Faith is a gift from God. Life with God begins in a formative way through Baptism. Once baptized, we are joined to the life of Christ, a mysterious thing, but one which is lived out in connection with God's Spirit. (We may not see it but life in the faith is a life of spiritual practice.) It is declared at baptism but it is often not heard is that the community of Christ is egalitarian where all people can maintain and live by their basic human rights, because people of faith work for justice.

SLIDE 10 – First Communion

For generations a faith community was commonly described as a group of persons holding a set of beliefs. Beliefs have their place but today it is more true to say that the faith community is a place where we live out the spirit. For example, we continue to use our voices together in professing faith using the Apostles' Creed but to speak of the marvel of faith is more like the feel and swell of music as the large group gathered joins their voices in musical harmony. It is breathing together, it is the rhythm of the words and phrases, and it is how sound reverberates in the air and the space and through our bodies. When we sing in worship we join practice and experience. Faith is a practice and an experience. It

is the practice which ends up defining us more than anything else. Through practice life speaks.

SLIDE 11 – Confirmation Class 2022

The journey of the baptized life is defining. It is where you spend your time. The life in the spirit, the life of practices is lived in several arenas. To me the spiritual practices which define the life of faith include worship, prayer, service, study, generosity, invitation and encouragement. It is through the practice that one becomes. You cannot decide you are generous. Instead you will need to practice acts of generosity, and through the practice you will become one who is generous, and people will experience you as generous.

SLIDE 12 – Parking Lot Communion

This fall at the Rostered Leaders Retreat our large group gathering was lead through an exercise where we drew similar patterns of lines on a piece of paper. First, we were given the materials of paper and colored pencils. Next, we watched as our leader had us mark our paper then watched further as she demonstrated roughly how to draw lines across the page. We were instructed to breathe in as we drew from the bottom to the top, then pause, and draw from the top to the bottom. I think we drew about 13 lines. There was to be no talking as we went about drawing the lines. After she instructed us, she then gave us permission to begin. Tens of people sat silently at their tables breathing in and drawing up, pausing, then exhaling while drawing down. Suddenly we were not only aware that we were breathing together, but we heard the sound of the pencil scraping on the paper in perfect rhythm. Once we drew in all thirteen lines we could take time to color in the paper and add lines to reveal the name “Immanuel.” In that moment God was with us and we were one. Faith is a practice and an experience. Through practice life speaks.

SLIDE 13 – Rembrandt “Christ Crucified”

Faith is not simply to make us feel good. Worship includes confession and forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, hope and nourishment. Faith is about setting things right so that all may have life. Faith has a purpose and an aim. The overall goal of the Servant Community is to make this way of the Lord known. We know God most through the suffering and death, the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Here we have Rembrandt’s drawing of Christ crucified and the reactions of those gathered. It is an awful scene. If you look closely you will see people in

grief and sorrow and shock; there are military gathered with their weapons of destruction; there are those who are humbled; there are those rushing away to give reports; there are people turning away in shame. In the Cross event, the great love of God was displayed before all, and the ripples of effect are still expanding.

SLIDE 14 – Lament of Gun Violence

The mystery of faith will show that death and destruction, violence and hatred are not the end. There is a better way, a way of life, and not just in the eternal realm. It is only discovered and seen in the practice. What I have discovered is there are more ways to come to see the fullness of grace and mercy than the faith practices I have outlined. There is the practice of mindfulness which can make us aware of so much in life which is often neglected or not honored or not seen. One of the great teachings of the practice of mindfulness is beginning again, over and over again, as the mind distracts, one needs to return to the practice.

SLIDE 15 – Cross at Cemetery

There is the deep study of scripture and other disciplines which helps to illuminate what life is. A poem by Mary Oliver says it well: “Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous to be understood. How grass can be nourishing in the mouths of lambs. How rivers and stones are forever in allegiance with gravity while we ourselves dream of rising. How two hands touch and the bonds will never be broken. How people come, from delight or the scars of damage, to the comfort of a poem. Let me keep my distance, always, from those who think they have the answers. Let me keep company always with those who say “Look!” and laugh in astonishment, and bow their heads.” Mary Oliver, “Mysteries, Yes”

SLIDE 16 – Palm Sunday photo bomb

The mysteries of the love of God in Christ Jesus run deep. Love is not how we feel, but found in the practice of life. In the most holy of weeks which begins with Palm Sunday God is revealed simply faithful to who God is. God is faithful to God’s own character and words. This is different from any vengeful and retaliatory understanding of life and justice, which is often how we think of justice today.

The Isaiah text emphasizes God’s justice. Richard Rohr recently wrote: God’s power for justice is precisely God’s power to restore people when they are broken or hurt. God uses their mistakes to liberate them, to soften them, to enlighten

them, to transform them, and to heal them. No text in Hebrew Scriptures equates God's justice with vengeance on the sinner. It might look like that on the surface, but if we read the whole passage and understand the context, chastisement is always meant to bring us back to love and union. God's justice is always saving justice, always healing justice. What is experienced as punishment is always for the sake of restoration, not for vengeance. Therefore, justice for the people is to participate in this wholeness and spaciousness of God, to be brought into God's freedom."

SLIDE 17 – Summer Stretch

Justice aims at making possible an egalitarian community, a community where we live up to the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. Practices of justice, practices of the spiritual life of the faithful, are for the ends of establishing life on earth that is life for all. When we accomplish this, God's name will be known, and our lives will truly speak.