

**“DAY BY DAY.....”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (ACTS 2:42-47) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON MAY 3, 2020----- (THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE EASTER SEASON, 2020)**

**HERE'S A FUNNY THING ABOUT THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD: THEY OFTEN DON'T RESEMBLE THEIR FOUNDERS.**

**ISLAM AND MUHAMMAD. BUDDHISM AND BUDDHA. CHRISTIANITY AND JESUS.**

**THE DOTS DON'T ALWAYS CONNECT.**

**AMERICAN JOURNALIST/COLUMNIST  
....POLITICAL COMMENTATOR....AND WINNER OF  
TWO PULITZER PRIZES NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
OBSERVES THAT "MUHAMMAD RAISED THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN IN HIS TIME, YET TODAY  
SOME ISLAMIC CLERICS BAR WOMEN FROM  
DRIVING." -----BUDDHA WOULD PROBABLY BE  
HORRIFIED BY THE RACIAL SEGREGATION THAT  
BUDDHISTS IN MYANMAR IMPOSE ON MINORITY  
MUSLIMS..... AND ALTHOUGH JESUS WAS A  
RADICAL WHO CHALLENGED THE  
ESTABLISHMENT, CHRISTIANITY HAS BEEN SO  
SUCCESSFUL THAT IN MANY PARTS OF THE  
WORLD IT HAS ACTUALLY *BECOME* THE  
ESTABLISHMENT.**

**RELIGIONS DON'T ALWAYS RESEMBLE THEIR**  
**FOUNDERS.**

**FORMER PASTOR BRIAN MCLAREN TAKES THIS  
EVEN FARTHER. IN HIS BOOK *THE GREAT  
SPIRITUAL MIGRATION*, HE WRITES THAT "OUR  
RELIGIONS OFTEN STAND FOR THE VERY  
OPPOSITE OF WHAT THEIR FOUNDERS STOOD  
FOR."**

***WHY IS THIS?***

**THE FOUNDERS OF RELIGIONS ARE USUALLY BOLD AND CHARISMATIC VISIONARIES..... THEY INSPIRE PEOPLE WITH THEIR FRESH INSIGHTS AND THEIR MORAL IMAGINATIONS..... BUT OVER TIME, THEIR TEACHINGS ARE PRESERVED BY RELIGIONS THAT ARE RUN BY RISK-AVERSE BUREAUCRACIES..... INSTEAD OF BEING BOLD AND VISIONARY, RELIGIONS BECOME OBSESSED WITH MONEY AND POWER. THAT'S WHY THERE WAS A POPULAR VIDEO PRODUCED A FEW YEARS AGO CALLED, "WHY I HATE RELIGION, BUT LOVE JESUS."**

**BECAUSE CHRISTIANITY HAS BECOME  
DISCONNECTED FROM JESUS, MANY PEOPLE  
ARE GETTING SICK OF THE CHURCH.....**

**BEFORE A RECENT WORSHIP SERVICE IN IOWA,  
THE PASTOR READ ALOUD A NOTE THAT HAD  
BEEN HANDED TO HIM A FEW MOMENTS  
EARLIER. "IT SAYS HERE THAT I SHOULD  
ANNOUNCE THAT THERE WILL BE NO B.S."**

**HE TUCKED THE PIECE OF PAPER IN HIS POCKET  
AND ADDED, "I'M HOPING THEY MEAN 'BIBLE  
STUDY.'"**

**PEOPLE WANT A CHURCH THAT IS TRUE TO**  
**JESUS, ALIGNED WITH HIS MINISTRY AND**  
**MISSION.**

**SO WE HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES, AS MCLAREN**  
**DOES:**

**"WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR CHRISTIANS TO**  
**REDISCOVER THEIR FAITH?" WHAT WOULD IT**  
**MEAN FOR US TO REDISCOVER CHRISTIANITY AS**  
**"A JUST AND GENEROUS WAY OF LIFE, ROOTED**  
**IN CONTEMPLATION AND EXPRESSED IN**  
**COMPASSION?"**

**FOR THIS TO HAPPEN, MCLAREN SAYS THAT WE  
NEED TO MIGRATE, MOVING FROM ONE WAY OF  
LIFE TO ANOTHER..... IN PARTICULAR, *HE  
CHALLENGES US TO MOVE FROM EXPRESSING  
OUR FAITH ONLY AS A SYSTEM OF BELIEFS "TO  
EXPRESSING IT AS A LOVING WAY OF LIFE."***

**THIS IS A MIGRATION AWAY FROM RELIGIOUS  
BUREAUCRACY AND BACK TO THE VISION OF  
OUR FOUNDER, JESUS CHRIST.....**

**IT'S A MOVE AWAY FROM POINTING FINGERS IN  
CONDEMNATION TO OPENING OUR HANDS TO  
ALLEVIATE HUMAN SUFFERING.**

**IT'S A MIGRATION FROM GOING IN DEBT FOR A BUILDING PROGRAM TO SPENDING TIME MAKING DISCIPLES -- THAT IS, LIVING LIKE THE FIRST CHRISTIANS DID AS DESCRIBED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AND TODAY'S TEXT.**

**A JUST AND GENEROUS WAY OF LIFE, ROOTED IN CONTEMPLATION AND EXPRESSED IN COMPASSION..... THAT'S THE KIND OF RELIGION THAT JESUS FOUNDED. AND IT'S THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION: WHAT CHURCH WOULD JESUS BELONG TO TODAY?**



IN ACTS CHAPTER 1, JESUS TELLS HIS FOLLOWERS, "YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH" (1:8)..... THEN HE DISAPPEARS.

HIS WORDS BECOME TRUE ACCORDING TO THE ACCOUNT IN ACTS 2 WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES UPON THEM -- ACTS TELLS US THAT "ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES, AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM ABILITY" (V. 4).

**IMMEDIATELY, THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS**

**BECOME WITNESSES.**

**THEY BEGIN TO SPEAK ABOUT "GOD'S DEEDS OF POWER" IN LANGUAGES THAT ARE CLEAR TO THE INTERNATIONAL CROWD THAT IS GATHERED IN JERUSALEM (V. 11). THEN THE APOSTLE PETER BEGINS TO SPEAK ABOUT THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS, GIVING TESTIMONY TO HOW "GOD RAISED HIM UP, HAVING FREED HIM FROM DEATH, BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BE HELD IN ITS POWER" (V. 24).**

**THESE WORDS RESULTED IN THE BAPTISM OF**

**3,000 PEOPLE IN ONE DAY ALONE!**

***BUT THE POWER OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE  
WAS COMMUNICATED NOT ONLY BY WORDS,  
BUT BY DEEDS.***

***ACTS TELLS US THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE  
CHURCH "DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE  
APOSTLES' TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP, TO THE  
BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS" (V.  
42). THEY SHARED EVERYTHING -- IN FACT,  
"THEY WOULD SELL THEIR POSSESSIONS AND  
GOODS AND DISTRIBUTE THE PROCEEDS TO  
ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED" (V. 45).***

**BECAUSE OF THIS JUST AND GENEROUS WAY  
OF LIFE, ROOTED IN PRAYER AND EXPRESSED IN  
COMPASSION, THE CHURCH HAD "THE  
GOODWILL OF ALL THE PEOPLE."**

**IT CONTINUED TO GROW, DAY BY DAY, AS "THE  
LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER THOSE WHO  
WERE BEING SAVED" (V. 47).**

**CLEARLY, THIS IS THE KIND OF RELIGION THAT  
RESEMBLES ITS FOUNDER. IT IS PRECISELY THE  
KIND OF CHURCH THAT JESUS WOULD WANT TO  
BELONG TO -- ONE DEFINED BY A LOVING WAY  
OF LIFE.**

**SO WHAT DOES SUCH A LIFE LOOK LIKE?**

***FIRST, IT IS A LIFE THAT IS NOT ATTACHED TO MATERIAL THINGS.....* A PASTOR WAS MET BY A CHURCH MEMBER AT THE DOOR AFTER WORSHIP. THE PASTOR COMMENTED ON THE GREAT TIE THE MAN WAS WEARING. THE MAN SMILED, THANKED HIM AND IMMEDIATELY -- RIGHT THERE AT THE DOOR -- TOOK IT OFF AND GAVE IT TO THE PASTOR. EVERYONE SEEMED SHOCKED AND A LITTLE EMBARRASSED BY SUCH A RADICAL ACT OF PUBLIC GENEROSITY.**

**JESUS WANTS TO BE PART OF A CHURCH THAT IS GENEROUS AND IS NOT ATTACHED TO MATERIAL THINGS..... A CHURCH OF THIS KIND EXISTED IN JERUSALEM, WHERE MEMBERS "WOULD SELL THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS AND DISTRIBUTE THE PROCEEDS TO ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED" (V. 45)..... SUCH CONGREGATIONS TODAY PUT CHURCH MISSION AHEAD OF CHURCH MAINTENANCE, AND GIVE GENEROUSLY TO PROGRAMS THAT FEED THE HUNGRY, SHELTER THE HOMELESS, WELCOME STRANGERS, RESCUE VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND VISIT PEOPLE IN PRISON.**

**THEY ARE NOT RELUCTANT TO PRACTICE  
EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY.....THEY ARE LIKE  
THE SMALL COUNTRY CHURCH THAT DONATED  
\$1,000 OF ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO ACQUIRE  
FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO TWO DIFFERENT  
LOCAL AREA FOODBANKS/MISSIONS IN THE  
MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC BECAUSE THE NEED  
WAS GREAT.....THE PRICE WAS SMALL IN  
COMPASSION.....(BY THE WAY....I AM SURE THAT  
YOU KNOW WHAT “SMALL COUNTRY CHURCH”  
THAT I AM TALKING ABOUT!)**

**TO BACKTRACK A MOMENT.....AFTER THE PASTOR RECEIVED THE TIE FROM HIS CHURCH MEMBER, HE HAD A CONVERSATION WITH HIS ASSOCIATE PASTOR. THE ASSOCIATE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE GIFT, BUT HE COULDN'T RESIST ASKING THE PASTOR A QUESTION: WHY DIDN'T YOU COMPLIMENT THE MAN ON *THE CAR* HE WAS DRIVING?!**

***SECOND, A LOVING WAY OF LIFE THAT IS OPEN AND RECEPTIVE TO OTHERS.....* JESUS IS A MODEL OF RECEPTIVITY, AND HE CHALLENGES US TO BE OPEN TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.**



IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK, JESUS GETS OUT OF A BOAT AND IMMEDIATELY RECEIVES A REQUEST FROM A LEADER OF THE SYNAGOGUE TO COME AND HEAL HIS DAUGHTER..... AS JESUS IS GOING TO HER, HE IS INTERRUPTED BY A WOMAN WITH A BLEEDING PROBLEM..... INSTEAD OF BEING ANNOYED, JESUS ATTENDS TO HER, AND THEN FINALLY MAKES IT TO THE LEADER'S HOUSE, ONLY TO FIND THAT THE LITTLE GIRL IS DEAD..... BUT JESUS IS NOT DISCOURAGED -- HE TELLS THE LEADER OF THE SYNAGOGUE, "DO NOT FEAR, ONLY BELIEVE." AND THEN HE RAISES THE LITTLE GIRL FROM THE DEAD (MARK 5:21-43).

JESUS SHOWS US THAT THE POWER OF GOD IS SEEN CLEARLY IN A LIFE OF OPENNESS AND RECEPTIVITY TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. IN JERUSALEM, "AWE CAME UPON EVERYONE, BECAUSE MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS WERE BEING DONE BY THE APOSTLES" (V. 43). THEY CARED FOR PEOPLE AROUND THEM, AND AS A RESULT THEY HAD "THE GOODWILL OF ALL THE PEOPLE" (V. 47).

THIRD, A LOVING WAY OF LIFE THAT IS MARKED BY SPIRITUAL MATURITY.

**IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH, THE MEMBERS  
"DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES'  
TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING  
OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS" (V. 42).**

**THEY MADE SURE THAT THEY WERE NOURISHED  
BY TEACHING AND PREACHING, COMMUNION  
AND PRAYER. SPIRITUAL FEEDING WAS NEEDED  
BEFORE CHURCH MEMBERS COULD GO OUT  
AND FEED THE HUNGRY AROUND THEM.**

**ACTS TELLS US THAT "AS THEY SPENT MUCH TIME TOGETHER IN THE TEMPLE, THEY BROKE BREAD AT HOME AND ATE THEIR FOOD WITH GLAD AND GENEROUS HEARTS" (V. 46). THEIR WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP STRENGTHENED THEM AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, CHANGING THEIR BEHAVIOR AND MAKING THEM MORE INTERESTED IN THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT THAN IN THE WORKS OF THE FLESH.**

**JESUS WANTS TO BE PART OF A CHURCH THAT IS SPIRITUALLY MATURE, ROOTED IN PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION. THE FRUITS OF SUCH A COMMUNITY ARE ACTS OF COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY.**

**SUCH A LIFE IS DESCRIBED WELL BY THE APOSTLE PAUL IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY, WHERE HE CHALLENGES HIS FELLOW CHRISTIANS TO "DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, GENEROUS AND READY TO SHARE" (6:18). THE RESULT, SAYS PAUL, IS "THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE" (V. 19, EMPHASIS ADDED).**

**JESUS WANTS US TO ENJOY THIS KIND OF LIFE --**  
**ONE MARKED BY A LACK OF ATTACHMENT TO**  
**MATERIAL THINGS, BY OPENNESS AND**  
**RECEPTIVITY TO OTHERS AND BY SPIRITUAL**  
**MATURITY. HE WANTS US TO BUILD A**  
**COMMUNITY OF JUSTICE AND GENEROSITY, ONE**  
**THAT IS ROOTED IN CONTEMPLATION AND**  
**COMMITTED TO ACTS OF COMPASSION.**

**WHEN WE DO, THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WON'T  
BE HATED BY THE WORLD. INSTEAD, IT WILL  
RECEIVE THE GOODWILL OF THE PEOPLE.**

**"IT IS NOT THE BUREAUCRACY THAT INSPIRES  
ME, OR DOCTRINE, OR ANCIENT RITUALS OR  
EVEN THE MOST GLORIOUS CATHEDRAL,"  
WRITES NICHOLAS KRISTOF, "BUT RATHER A  
CATHOLIC MISSIONARY DOCTOR IN SUDAN  
TREATING BOMB VICTIMS, [OR] AN  
EVANGELICAL PHYSICIAN ACHIEVING THE  
IMPOSSIBLE IN RURAL ANGOLA. ... THEY FILL ME  
WITH AN ALMOST HOLY SENSE OF AWE. NOW,  
THAT'S RELIGION."**

**THAT'S A CHURCH THAT JESUS WOULD BE  
PROUD TO JOIN.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND**

**FOR ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

**AMEN!!!!**