

Mark 6:30-34,53-56

Three years here and our Parish picnic today... Today we have Jesus Teaching, Preaching and Healing. That was Jesus' mission then and today that's our mission... I would like to spend some time summarizing what we have been focusing on here for the last three years... Bottom Line Up Front... Discipleship... what's that mean?

At times following the way of Jesus can be exhausting and overwhelming... so we definitely need to find times for sabbath and renewal... and these folks today were so tired of the things going on around them back then... between the Religious Elite and the Roman Empire they were spiritually depleted... mmmm sound familiar! They were like sheep without a shepherd.

Today there are also many voices out there just looking for some sheep... lots of con artists and false shepherds to be sure... preying on the aged, the innocent, and the unawares!

But make no mistake... here at Holy Family we only have had one shepherd and... that's not me... that would be Jesus! If anything I'm more like a sheepdog nipping at your heels trying to keep everyone on track... and if I'm lucky to perhaps reveal old things in new and interesting ways... in Hebrew Rabbinical Circles that's what's called turning the gem... looking at things from many different points of view.

So has anything changed... and if we truly are following the voice of this shepherd we will always know it by the fruit that we are producing.

And those fruits of the Spirit always comes with certain feelings: a feeling of peace - shalom being connected to God the ground of being; a feeling of agape - love being connected and open to others; and a feeling of joy - as opposed to happiness which is fleeting and circumstantial.

And always strive to meet folks wherever and however they are... because everyone has different views of what we call God!

And that was the way of Jesus...when He taught and preached he did so in simple terms to everyday folks...aside from basic Torah then most people couldn't read or write...

Jesus' message was simple, understandable, and dangerous to the status quo. His message was not about religion or theology but rather about relationships...using everyday analogies like sheep and seeds to teach them about God and a reality He called the Kingdom of God or Heaven.

Jesus pointed us to a Relationship WITH God and WITH each other.

And like any healthy relationship they must always begin with Trust. That's the word for Faith in the Bible. And Jesus continually focused us on His two great commands...Love God and Love the Other...and we are mandated to do this...it's not an option for us! And Jesus made NO exceptions.

And what's this Bible really about? It's a collection of stories, poems and songs which reflect the history of a particular group of people in a particular place and time as they wrestle with their comprehension and relationship with God.

And as you have hopefully seen through God Talk and through our sermons here that context really does matter! See the Bible taken as a whole is really just a love story between a creator and its creations... as told by us... the creations...and it's foundation and heart is always grounded in love.

And there's a flow...a trajectory to the story. It evolves and changes from beginning to end like all stories. In many ways it looks like a parent - child relationship... showing the evolution of a human being from child to adult. Learning and growing in a familial relationship...a holy family! Through this parent-child relationship Jesus reveals to us a bigger Divine reality - The Kingdom of God.

And if we don't get it then Jesus calls us to repent...change your heart...turn around...see things from a bigger point of view...God's point of view...cause it's easy for us creations to lose the plot along the way! And so we come here to remind ourselves to serve God's will and not our own.

Kingdom of man or Kingdom of God. Is it God's will be done or my will be done for me and my tribe? God created in my image or are we created in God's image!

Now Jesus taught, preached and healed...in today's readings Jesus is at Gennesaret near one of the cities of the Decapolis... a modern and progressive Greek and Roman.

See it was never about just me... or my people... or my religion...not just about Jews...or Christians... but rather about all of us together... for the health and wellbeing of all of God's creation.

Jesus literally and figuratively throughout the gospels goes out of His way to pull back the camera so that we can begin to see ourselves as part of something bigger...God's greater design.

Psst: And From way out here you'll see no border lines drawn all over our planet...we do that...not God!

We follow the way of Jesus...the way of Love...and heaven is a state of being... to be experienced here and now...same as hell...it's a state of being.

Today we see the disciples being both disciples and apostles.

See we always live in the tension between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. We get hungry, tired, sick...we pay bills and follow rules and yet all of us know that there is so much more than meets the eye! That which we don't see... but that which is just as real! It's like Oxygen or Love...can't see it or touch it...better get us some of those things Uh?!

It's the thing behind the thing that connects us all as one...here we call it the Holy Spirit!

Now we can all get these concepts into our heads...but it's only when we get them inside of our being that we will begin to act in ways which are in alignment with God.

As followers of Jesus, we are now asked to be co-creators in partnership with our creator! Jesus' disciples follow... and then go and do exactly as their teacher has shown them. We participate with God in reconciling the world – Tikun Olam.

Jesus AND the Disciples do ministry in the world...especially for those whom the world and the systems of power may have forgotten.

And this “way of Jesus” must be practiced each and every day for it to come natural for us...do you know the word Zen...it means “not think”...think of anything that comes automatically to you... like driving a car...new drivers can easily be overwhelmed because they have to think about so many things!...that's why new drivers are accident prone.

Sometimes when I drive it's almost unconscious...and my body in this state can react even faster than my mind can process information...that's Zen! Athletes strive to be in this state of being...lots of practice to make things come naturally...automatically.

When we are in the state of connectedness and are open... we call that discipleship...it means to be a humble, and open student. And once we begin to live this way... then we are sent to teach others... especially by the way we live our lives...we then walk the talk!

So we come here and we learn...and then we go and teach. We take in new wisdom and information to broaden our perspectives and in doing so we continually broaden our views about God and creation...it's an expansive thing.

See God can't be contained within our smaller boxes...our smaller ideas and views of the Divine Source of All being!

We are always breathing in...but then we have to breath out! We take in the Spirit and then give it back to the world...We call this Grace!

Sounds easy enough...but like yoga or any discipline... it takes years and years of practice...and it never really ends!

Oh and don't worry about results...while Jesus was preaching and teaching and healing around Galilee he had thousands of followers...and why not... he was giving them a message where the wealthy now had to share their stuff with them...where they would finally be noticed and included...where they would be given free health care and free lunches!

But when Jesus called them to all to "walk the talk" and follow His example...well only 12 actually followed him! And even those that followed him closely still didn't actually get what He was about until Jesus himself walked the talk...all the way to a cross.

Free food and free healthcare...sign me up; community of loving and giving... standing up for those with no voice...picking up a cross and following Jesus...sorry I just remembered I have some other stuff to do.

See here in the Kingdom of Man these things will cost us every time...but in God's bigger picture, this is the only real way to live...it's the way to life...life everlasting...here and now!

Now let's talk a little Politics (It's Greek... polis means city...it's the way in which we humans live and order our common life together)...the Decapolis meant 10 cities.

So I have said to many of you...I hang in the radical middle... to me either end of a political spectrum can easily go off target and become dangerous. Because this creates and fosters binary thinking...dualistic thinking... it will always divide us and will always tend to pull us apart (the word diabolic means to break apart).

Paul right before his death finally got it...he said...there is no male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or free...republican or democrat.

Near the end of his life Paul began to pull back the camera and broadened his perspective about God...a perspective where all becomes one. Dualistic thinking quickly gets us into trouble...that's why our idea of God is expressed as a Holy Trinity....three not two polar opposites.

And Holy (the word Kadosh) means to be set apart...so the Holy Trinity takes us into what Jesus was a master at...third way thinking... He transcended our human nature where things are no longer right or wrong or black or white, or good or bad...

See we have to get God out of our carefully constructed human boxes...the smaller we imagine God... the worst it is for everyone that doesn't think like we do. We have to always remember to strive to imagine God in bigger and more expansive ways!

...and it's a journey that we all take together...with God and with each other...here in our Holy Family! And by the way...you certainly don't need all the answers...nor do I have them...It's rather about us having a conversation together...especially one with questions.

And I promise you God (and I) can handle all of your frustration, anger, doubts and questions...just like any loving parent could!

See ultimately, we are all just Children of God...and we all need to be reminded sometimes. We are all students AND teachers...disciples AND apostles...breathing in AND breathing out...giving AND receiving... it's all GRACE!

Here we can attain heaven together...and that reality can happen wherever you are...it is a way of being...a way of life...not just a nice philosophy or theology! It's about experience and less about belief! Jesus said it like this "you can hear or not hear...see or not see...because both kingdoms coexist together.

It's like those pictures that if you look at it one way you see the old woman, and the other way you see the young woman. The secret is to know that you can go between the two and that both exist together.

Third way thinking is not about one way OR another way...it's about AND...both ways together. Pierre Tel Chardin said it like this: we are not Human Beings having a Spiritual Experience but rather we are Spiritual beings having a Human Experience!

With this shift in perspective, you'll come to see that you are not your circumstances or your situations or your stuff or the labels that people give you...you are something soooo much more...you are a child of the Universe...a Child of God... now we have to go out and act like one!

And the litmus test on this path will be to continually to ask ourselves...is what we're doing here connecting us or dividing us...building us up or tearing us down...is this about love and serving one another... or simply just about my own fears and my own ego?

It's a Uni-verse...One verse...One song...It's all relational and connected!

Whenever you doubt yourself or lose your way...always fall back on Jesus' mission statement: Love God and Love one another...for this is God's heart...and this is God's desire for us as God's Children.

And our shepherd...Jesus... has...and always will show us "the way!"

I graciously and humbly thank you all for allowing me the privilege and honor of serving and accompanying you all on this journey together for the past three years...I am looking forward to seeing what God has in store for us in the coming years here in God's One... Holy Family!

Your faithful servant,

carmen