

Devotion: May 19, 2020

John 8:44-47

“If God were your father,” said Jesus, “you would love me, for I came from God and arrived here. I didn’t come on my own. He sent me. Why can’t you understand one word I say? Here’s why: You can’t handle it. You’re from your father, the Devil, and all you want to do is please him. He was a killer from the very start. He couldn’t stand the truth because there wasn’t a shred of truth in him. When the Liar speaks, he makes it up out of his lying nature and fills the world with lies. I arrive on the scene, tell you the plain truth, and you refuse to have a thing to do with me. Can any one of you convict me of a single misleading word, a single sinful act? But if I’m telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Anyone on God’s side listens to God’s words. This is why you’re not listening—because you’re not on God’s side.”

“Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth.” –Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Propaganda Minister

Except when it doesn’t, Joe.

Like, say, in the face of a relentless virus. Then, when all the lies about cures and vaccines and miracles have failed, all too often despair sets in, an inability to believe there is a way forward. Lies or despair, these are the ultimate and disastrous outcomes of relying on human ability alone.

That’s why Jesus went to the cross to demonstrate God’s power to defeat death, the ultimate lie that overshadows human life and joy. Jesus’ rejection by the religious authorities, his suffering on the cross, and his death in weakness provide both the proof of human frailty and the absolute necessity of God’s intervention.

We need to remember that it is God who, in Jesus, enters into our mortal, vulnerable condition. It is God who endures unjust suffering and unbearable loss. It is God, ultimately, who dies. Jesus’ cross and resurrection testify not merely to human weakness, but to God’s complete embrace of our weakness out of love.

During this time of isolation, with the churches being shut, we see in the media some Christian leaders asserting their individual rights and religious liberty to gather again in-person for worship regardless of the best advice about safety, about limiting the spread of the coronavirus, and about guarding the larger community against a resurgence of the virus and the physical, economic, and psychological toll that would take – at this particular time of Christian leaders claiming their rights, we might remember that Jesus urged us to not seek freedom but see to our neighbor’s needs. Not by claiming our freedom but by giving up some of our freedoms for the sake of our neighbor. Not by arguing that we are entitled to worship Jesus only in our churches but by demonstrating that the most faithful worship of the God we know in Christ is through service to the vulnerable. Opportunities to glorify God by serving others, it turns out, all are around us and never more available than in times of extreme need.

I know, there will be all kinds of factors influencing our decision to open our churches, ranging from the presence of the virus in our community to the size and kind of gatherings we usually have. But... one thing continues to be true for all: that Jesus has given us a new commandment, to love one another, and that obeying that command, and trusting in the promises of the sacrificially loving God we know in Jesus, is the ultimate Truth.

Let us pray:

Holy God, let us be faithful witnesses to the power of your love. Let our lives mirror hope in the midst of despair, let our deeds be filled with compassion in a world of bruising indifference, let our words be truthful when misinformation holds center stage, let our forgiveness build new bridges of reconciliation. Let Easter joy linger in our hearts and fill us with courage and hope. Amen.

Stay safe and sane

Pastor Jack