

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Easter 7

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we may or may not have seen the special televised event that took place a week ago Saturday.

There was a special televised event called "Graduate Together: High School Class of 2020 Commencement."

Maybe you watched it. Maybe you didn't.

But I bring it up because during the event, Former President Barack Obama addressed the graduates.

And within that speech, Obama had this to say.

"The pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain of the idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they're doing. A lot of them aren't even pretending to be in charge."

And regardless of all the other words in Obama's speech...

Regardless of the remaining content in Obama address, it was these words...

"This pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain of the idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they're doing. A lot of them aren't even pretending to be in charge."

It was these words that made headlines news.

And so, what should have been a celebration of the 2020 graduates was overshadowed by politics.

Now, whether we personally agree or disagree with our former president is beside the point.

Whether we are republican or democrat, or independent...

Or, whether we are conservative or liberal, or moderate is beside the point.

Regardless, what stuck out about Obama's words was the divisive nature of those words at that particular moment.

Now, don't get me wrong, it is certainly within Obama's purview to express his opinion, but it was, at least in my opinion, unfortunate that it was done in such an untimely manner.

Especially when the underlying focus of this commencement event, as I understood it, was to bring some semblance of unified celebration for our young people.

No, I am not wanting to come off as criticizing one politician versus another, nor I am saying Obama's statement is right or wrong.

I am simply opposed to the divisiveness surrounding Obama's words at that particular moment, which was then exacerbated by the media headlines.

And the divisiveness was all the more ramped up by President Trump who subsequently denigrated Barack Obama.

Trump said: "He (Barack Obama) was an incompetent president. That's all I can say, 'Grossly incompetent.'"

Really...guys?

This is the best you can do as leaders of our nation?

Take a jab at the acting President during a commencement speech on national television.

And respond by characterizing a former president's entire 8-year tenure in office as "grossly incompetent."

PAUSE

And Jesus prayed these words, "Holy Father, may they be one, as we are one."

"May they be one, as we are one."

Now these words are part of the prayer which Jesus prays on the eve of his crucifixion.

Thus, we could say that that these words are contained within Jesus' farewell speech.

And what I think is interesting to note is that Jesus apparently prayed these words out loud.

Jesus apparently prayed these words out loud within the hearing of his disciples.

At least that is how the gospel writer John depicts Jesus praying this prayer.

Indeed, Jesus would have to have prayed this prayer out loud, in order for the gospel writer John to know what Jesus had prayed, and so then recorded in his gospel.

How else could anyone have known what Jesus prayed, unless Jesus prayed out loud?

But the fact that Jesus is depicted as having prayed out loud also highlights the fact that Jesus' words are important, such that Jesus wants his disciples to be attentive to his words.

PAUSE

Now those words of Jesus' prayer focus obviously on unity.

Unity is of vital importance to Jesus and to God the Father.

“May they be one,” Jesus prays, “as we are one.”

Jesus prays for unity.

And, yes, the unity Jesus is praying for here is unity among Christian believers.

And we might ask, “How did Jesus know?”

How did Jesus know that there would be divisions within the Church, such that he then prays for unity?

How did Jesus know that the church in its infancy would be rife with division, particularly between those Jewish Christians and those Gentile Christians?

How did Jesus know?

And how did Jesus know that the one universal church would divide in 1054 A.D. such that the Eastern Orthodox believers would form one branch of Christianity and the Western Roman Catholic believers would form another branch?

How did Jesus know?

And how did Jesus know that the Roman Catholic Church would subsequently divide in 1517, when the Reformation got started in Germany and throughout all of Europe?

How did Jesus know?

Yes, Jesus is God’s Son, so we would think that he has special divine insight into the unfolding of history, and so that’s how he would know.

But furthermore, Jesus knew there would be division among God’s people, because Jesus knew something about human nature.

Like any good Jew familiar with the history of humanity, Jesus would have known the divisions that plague human history since time immemorial.

Jesus knew for instance that...

Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And Jesus knew that Cain rose up and killed his brother Abel.

That Sarah, wife of Abraham, dealt harshly with her slave girl Hagar, and Hagar ran away.

That Jacob stole the birthright from his brother Esau, and the two brothers went their separate ways.

That Jacob favored his wife Rachel over his wife Leah.

That Joseph's brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt.

That Pharaoh enslaved the people of Israel.

That Moses killed an Egyptian.

That Delilah betrayed Samson to the Philistines.

That David raped Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah.

That Jonah despised the inhabitants of Nineveh.

That the Assyrians defeated the tribes of Northern Israel and removed them from the holy land.

That the Babylonians defeated the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed the holy city.

That the Samaritans and the Jews do not hold things in common.

That lepers are regarded with disdain.

That tax collectors and prostitutes are grouped among those of ill-repute.

So on and so forth...yes, Jesus knew, knew the many, MANY divisions that had plagued human history since time immemorial.

Jesus knew that there is something inherent in humans that cause divisions among people, and so Jesus prayed that God's people might be one.

And unfortunately, we've made little progress when it comes to overcoming that power that causes division in the human race.

We still struggle with divisions emerging from nationalism.

We demonize China because they are deemed responsible for the outbreak of the coronavirus.

We still struggle with divisions emerging from race.

Ahmaud Arbery can't go for a run without being accosted by two white men and killed.

We even struggle with divisions emerging from what it means to be "free" in the time of a pandemic.

People will march on their state capitol protesting the "injustice" done to them, such that they are not free to re-start their businesses and live their lives as they want.

Yes, it almost seems as though if there is some reason for which people can divide into camps, we will find it.

Yes, it is almost a given that if there is some way by which people can group themselves as US versus THEM, we will be drawn to it.

I don't know why that is the case.

I don't know why we as people are so tempted as to draw lines in the sand.

I don't know why it is that we feel compelled to stand in opposition to the other.

I don't know why it is except to say that it is the power of sin at work our lives.

Sin is that which seeks to divide us one from another and from God.

Yes, sin divides pure and simple.

Sin divides parent from child, husband from spouse, sibling from sibling, person from person, human creature from Creator God. Sin divides.

And so it is Jesus who reveals to us the power of grace, which is about crossing over the dividing lines to restore human fellowship.

This is what Jesus was about. This is who Jesus is.

He is the one always "crossing the line," he is grace incarnate.

Jesus is the one who crosses lines....from heaven to earth, from divine to human, from Word to flesh, from all-powerful to servant, from cross to grave, and from death to life.

From glory to glory to glory to glory to glory.

Yes, crossing the line in Jesus' reality is one step of glory to the next step glory, to the next step glory.

Yes, crossing the line for Jesus is crossing from glory to glory to glory...

... because Jesus, in his crossing lines, Jesus is focused on bringing about the restoration of creation, he is about bringing all things to himself, he is about making everything one.

Every step of Jesus, everywhere Jesus is crossing a line—there is glory, because the world is that much closer to ultimate redemption.

Crossing each line is a journey from glory to glory to glory.

PAUSE

Now, the apostle Paul says it is the same for us human beings.

We are being changed from glory to glory to glory.

In II Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes, "All of us, seeing the glory of Lord...are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord..."

Paul speaks of this human transformation from one glory to the next, the result of acting boldly with hope.

Acting boldly with hope in my opinion means that like Jesus we are willing to cross lines for the sake of the redemption of creation and for the restoration of human fellowship.

Crossing lines is to live in God's glory, like Christ who crossed lines for the world's redemption, and the glorification of God the Father.

PAUSE

Yes, divisiveness works against God's plan.

And, true, sometimes we do have to stand in opposition to injustice, sometimes we have to draw lines in the sand.

But the true servant of justice and mercy is the one who can heal opposing parties.

Jesus is the prime example of one who approached his ministry in this world in just this way.

Jesus sought healing for all people, not just one side of a dividing line.

Jesus sought unification, the healing of all people.

And Christ's cross is THE perfect symbol of that all-inclusive healing.

For the cross is of all things the depiction of the "crossing of lines", isn't it?

One line is crossed by another, signifying, if you will, Jesus' desire to cross all lines, all barriers, and bring us all together.

Yes, the cross is where Jesus takes upon himself the power of sin that divides us, such that sin dies with our Lord.

On the cross Jesus takes sin and crosses it out, such that we might all be one.
Thanks be to God. Amen.