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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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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, it is gospel texts like the one we have today that make me wonder if Jesus was not in fact married and had children, even teenage children.

Now, we know the bible makes no mention of such a thing.

But that has not stop some from speculating that Jesus was married and that, in fact, Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife.

Mary Magdalene is definitely a prominent woman in the gospels.

She is named twelve times, more than most of the apostles, and more than any other woman in the Gospels, except for Jesus' family.

In every passage, except one, where she is listed as part of a group of women, she is listed first.

So, yes, Mary Magdalene is a prominent woman in the Bible.

She seems to be the leading woman in the gospel stories.

So, it is at least a possibility that she was in fact Jesus' wife.

And who knows, maybe Jesus and Mary Magdalene had children, maybe even teenage children.

For I think it is uncanny how well Jesus understands the behavior of children.

How could he know the way kids behave, for instance, unless he had firsthand knowledge?

I mean who among us as children growing up hadn't done the very thing Jesus describes in our gospel lesson today.

There was a man who had two sons.

Two teenage sons, I would guess.

There was a man who had two teenage sons.

And it doesn't have to be sons.

Teenage daughters tend to be no different, right?

Anyway, this father of two teenage children has some work that needs to be done.

Son, I need you to get the trash together in the house.

Tomorrow is trash day, so please get the trash together so that it is ready to be collected tomorrow.

Or, maybe the dishes are piling up in the sink.

Daughter, would you please empty the dishwasher, and refill it, and would you please clean the sink?

And we can just hear the teenager, can't we?

"Yes, yes. I will get to it. I will take care of it."

And, we, as a parent, might have to check-in with them a little later, if the chores were not completed.

Son, would you please get the garbage around the house?

Daughter, would you please clean the dishes in the sink?

"Yes, yes," they say, assuring us that it will be done.

And a little more time passes, and still the chores aren't completed.

Son, I am not going to ask again. Please collect the trash around the house.

And, daughter, please do the dishes.

And, the next day rolls around. And the trash hasn't been collected and the dishes haven't been done.

And, as a parent, we are more than a little frustrated. (PAUSE)

And then there is the other scenario.

We ask our teenagers to do their chores and they say, "They haven't got the time."

"They have too much school work to do."

"Or they can't, because they are late for this or that appointment."

But then, the teenager sees us, their parents starting to do the work we asked, like getting the trash together, or doing the dishes, and the teenage has a change of heart.

And whatever other commitment that teenager had is put on hold and they do their chores.

PAUSE

Jesus describes the behavior of teenagers perfectly, which makes us can't help but wonder, was Jesus married, did he have kids?

How could he know teenagers so well?

And Jesus uses this example of teenagers and their chores most effectively, Friends.

Jesus uses this example of teenagers and their chores to address the chief priests and the elders.

He addresses these religious elites with a similar message as we had heard last week.

Last week's gospel, remember, was about workers who went into the vineyard.

In particular, last week's gospel was about those laborers who went to the vineyard late in the day, but received the same daily wage as those who had worked the entire day.

In this gospel lesson the one son says he won't do his chores, but eventually changes his mind.

This son faithfully responds but not at first, only later, like the workers who in last week's gospel went to work in the vineyard in the latter part of the day.

And, Jesus is proclaiming the same message in both parables.

It is a message about those who arrive “late to the party.”

Although the prostitutes and tax collectors in Jesus’ day had not initially responded to the will of God, they are now coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

The prostitutes and tax collectors are arriving late to the party, and that is okay, because the good news is that they have shown up.

PAUSE

Now, in our society today, we have a sort of opposite problem.

Instead of people showing up late to the party...

We have persons who had been there at the party all along, who are now all of sudden disappearing from the party.

As we know, congregational attendance is not what it had been.

More and more people are falling away from church.

But there are not other people flocking to the church in their stead.

And I wonder what Jesus would say to those persons.

What kind of parable would Jesus share in our present day situation?

My guess is that it might be something like a parable about a party.

Jesus might tell a parable about persons who had gathered for an all-night celebration.

And there are many people gathered at the party, people who are making much rejoicing and celebrating, and the party looks to continue into the wee hours of the morning.

But for some, they find it impossible to stay out all night.

And they drifted away from the party, deciding to leave the celebration and go back home.

Now, in all truthfulness, I would be one of those persons who would find it difficult to stay out all night at a party anymore.

There was a time, I might be able to do that.

Not anymore.

There is a saying that goes, “When I was younger, I snuck out of the house to go to party. Now that I am older, I sneak out of a party to go back home.”

So Jesus might use the analogy of an all-night party to highlight the disappearance of persons from the present day church.

But the question is “What do we do about it?”

How do we replenish the numbers at church?

That would seem to be the question, wouldn’t it?

But, I am not so sure. I am not so sure that this is the question we want to be asking.

For you see, God does NOT call the church to focus on numbers, to fill the pews.

No, God calls us to focus on making disciples.

In the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus commands his followers to “Go, and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

“Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach.”

Did Jesus say, “Pack in the church pews?” Did Jesus say, “Swell the church ranks.”

Did our Lord tell us to “Cram them in, jam them in, stuff the sanctuary full?”

No. Numbers don’t seem to be an issue for Jesus.

Now, yes, Jesus does say to make disciples of ALL NATIONS.

And that would seem to imply that we are to swell the ranks, but it could just as easily mean that the gospel is to go out into all the world, that there should be no place untouched by the gospel.

No, numbers do not seem to be an issue as much as courage.

That we would be daring on behalf of the gospel.

That we would serve the world, looking outward to transform the world, as opposed to inward to fill the pews.

So often we get caught up in thinking inwardly.

So often, we think that the church would be better off if it had members enough to support the pastor, and the church building, and there was money left over.

No, the church would be better off if the world would see that the church is out in the world transforming the world through the power of the gospel.

And so I often wonder, “What is my role as a pastor?”

So often, I have to stop and consider “what am I supposed to be doing from this pulpit?”

Am I to make the members of the church feel good about themselves—to assure you that you are forgiven, to assure you that you are loved?

Am I to make the members of the church, all of you feel, that you are in good standing with God?

That is only part of it, I believe.

What Jesus did in his ministry is not just help the people, particularly those who felt ostracized and unloved, like the tax collectors and prostitutes...

What Jesus did in his ministry is not just help people feel welcomed and in good standing with God...

What Jesus ultimately did in his ministry is inspire people.

And we need to remember that the word in-spire, has the same root as the word “spirit.”

What Jesus did in his ministry is inspire people, to fill the spirit of people, so that those same now spirit-filled people were courageous and bold on behalf of the gospel?

We have to remember that it wasn’t a large group that transformed the world by the gospel, it wasn’t about numbers.

It was only twelve people inspired by their Lord. Twelve people, by their courage, transformed the world.

And so then what does it mean to be so spirit-filled so as to be courageous?

Imagine a conversation we might have with a person in power who is supposed to lead us.

What if we were to say to such a person in power, “I will follow you, because you are my sovereign, my lord.”

And what if that person were to respond to us saying, “Don’t follow me because I am your Sovereign or your Lord. Don’t follow me because of my title. For people should not follow someone because of their title. People should follow because they are inspired by courage.”

And, what if that same sovereign and Lord followed up by saying, “And if you would rise up to lead others, if you would display courage, others would follow you, and so would I.”

Imagine a sovereign so moved by our courage, as then to assure us he or she was backing us up because of our courage?

What if we were to show that kind of courage such that others would follow us, such that even persons in power would get behind us?

This is the inspiration we need from our leaders, particularly those whom we will be choosing in the upcoming election.

We need persons who inspire us with courage.

And we, as members of the church, we need ourselves to be courageous, if we hope to sustain the church in this day and age.

If we would only display that kind of courage on behalf of the gospel, we would know that God is already backing us up.

Jesus, our Lord, was courageous, he was fiercely faithful and obedient to God to the point of death on a cross.

God the Father backed him up, such that Jesus was then raised from the dead.

Most of time, we are people who are like teenagers responding to our parents.

Most of time, we are wishy-washy.

We say to God’s call, “I will not go,” and only later do we have a change of heart.

Or we say to God's call, "I will go," but then we never get around to it.

But what if, what if, instead, we were to embrace God's call with such enthusiasm as to even surprise ourselves? What if we were fiercely courageous for the sake of the gospel?

Would it not mean the transformation of the church by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Would it not mean that we ourselves would be transformed, such that we would experience a renewal of life like Jesus himself experienced in his resurrection?

I leave you with that thought for today. Amen.