

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
June 11, 2023

Our Saviour/St. Stephen's
Pentecost 2

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

We may or may not be familiar with the concept of a hashtag, as it relates to social media outlets, like Twitter.

But a hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign, which is the same as the pound sign, the little Tic Tac Toe sign.

And, as I said, these words or phrases preceded by a hash sign are used on social media sites and applications.

These hashtags as they are called, these words or phrases used on social media sites, are used to identify digital content on a specific topic.

So, for example, there was the #letsdolunch at one time, where the hash sign was followed by the words let's do lunch.

#letsdolunch was used by Domino's Pizza as their 2012 campaign.

The hashtag was connected to Domino's one-day promotion, which ran on March 5, 2012, from 9am to 11am.

And so every time someone tweeted #letsdolunch it resulted in Domino's cutting the price of their pizza for that day by a penny...every time.

And after some 85,000 tweets the price of pizza fell to less than half its cost on that day.

It was good for those buying pizza that day. And it was good for Domino's because all that Tweeting about their pizza was great publicity.

And that is how hashtags work—they are often good for those who are promoting something because of the publicity, and they are good for those on the receiving end.

Various companies and agencies have used hashtags to promote a campaign or a cause, for hashtags are an excellent way to publicize, to promote, to broadcast to the world.

PAUSE

And this got me thinking, "What if Jesus lived in our present day?"

What if Jesus were living today and what if he were to make use of a hashtag?

What hashtag might he use to promote the Gospel?

What hashtag might he use to promote himself?

#sonofgod might be a good one.

#incarnateword or #saviour or #greatshepherdofthesheep are all possible hashtags.

Or how about #believeandbesaved? That might be another good hashtag.

Or how about #emptycrossempytomb?

PAUSE

Now, even though all of these hashtags may sound good to our ears, there is still one other hashtag more fitting, more apropos at least at it pertains to Jesus' ministry.

And that is this: #gluttonanddrunkard

#gluttonanddrunkard

Certainly catches your attention, doesn't it?

#gluttonanddrunkard

Yes, if our Lord Jesus were to create a hashtag in order to promote the Gospel, in order to promote himself...

Yes, if our Lord Jesus were to use social media to grab out attention, I am almost certain this would be Jesus' hashtag.

Why am I so sure this would be our Lord's hashtag?

Because this is what people were already saying about Jesus.

This was the reputation Jesus had carved out for himself.

Jesus was understood to be a drunkard and a glutton.

We hear it in our gospel reading today.

The Pharisees see Jesus sitting down to dinner, and who are the people gathered around him?

Tax collectors and sinners.

And the Pharisees ask Jesus' disciples, "Why? Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

And if we didn't know tax collectors were frowned upon by Jews because tax collectors were persons who were in cahoots with the Roman government.

Tax collectors were in cahoots with the Roman occupiers.

And so anyone who was a tax collector was frowned upon.

Tax collectors then were lumped in with all the other sinners, like prostitutes and infirmed persons.

And so, we have this question here in this gospel text.

“Why, if Jesus is understood to be a great religious teacher, why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

He ought to know better.

And then, and then in Matthew 11:19, only a few chapters later in this same Gospel, we hear that Jesus himself acknowledging what non-believers are saying about him.

People see me, says Jesus, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”

So, this is what people were saying about Jesus.

And Jesus is quite aware of it.

This is the reputation Jesus had carved out for himself.

He is one who is a glutton and a drunkard.

And so, would it not make sense to for Jesus to use this description of himself as his hashtag?

#gluttonanddrunkard

PAUSE

But what is my point? I am glad you asked.

PAUSE

For, you see, in the Old Testament, this phrase “glutton and drunkard” was used to describe those sons who were not obedient to their parents.

In fact, in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 it says these words.

“If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, ‘This son of our is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from inside your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.”

So, here we have this text from Deuteronomy that deals with sons who are disobedient, sons who are undisciplined, sons who do not obey their parents.

And this is what then the religious elite are saying of Jesus.

Jesus is a glutton and a drunkard. He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners.

How then could he possibly be religious teacher? How could he possibly be God's Son?

But that is exactly the point.

You see, sisters and brothers in Christ, our Lord Jesus was re-writing the rules of religion in his day.

Jesus was overturning the tables, both literally and figuratively.

Jesus was upending the former ways of living out the faith.

For we see, much of the faith practices in Jesus' day, were about what one should NOT do.

Thou shall NOT kill. Thou shall NOT steal. Thou shall NOT commit adultery.

So on and so forth, right?

All these things about what one should NOT do.

All the more, consider the second half of our Gospel reading today. Here we have examples of what should NOT do.

A woman who had suffered hemorrhages for twelve years comes up and touches the fringe of Jesus' cloak.

Anyone see a problem here?

According to Leviticus 15:25ff., to have any contact with a woman who is bleeding would make an individual unclean.

By the woman touching Jesus, she has in effect made Jesus ritually unclean.

And so, one would almost expect Jesus to cry out in alarm, "Woman, why have you touched me? Do you not see that you have now made me unclean."

But, we don't hear Jesus say any such thing.

Instead, we read that quite to the contrary of Jesus' being made unclean, the power of healing radiates out from Jesus so as to heal the woman thus restoring her to ritual purity.

And then furthermore, we read that Jesus goes to the house of a leader of the synagogue, and Jesus goes to the place where the daughter of this man is lying.

And this girl is dead, and what does Jesus do?

He takes her by the hand, and the girl is restored back to life.

And again, this is quite out of the ordinary, because according to Numbers 19:11, to touch a dead body again causes a person to be unclean.

But instead of Jesus being infected with uncleanness, Jesus' power emanates from him to bring life to the girl.

And in the midst of all this, Jesus sums up his ministry very succinctly.

Jesus says he is a physician of sorts.

Jesus says he is one who has been called to those who are sick.

And Jesus then quotes Hosea 6:6, saying, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

In that verse, Hosea is proclaiming the words of God, so in effect, it says, "God desires mercy, not sacrifice."

And this is what Jesus is doing in his ministry. He is demonstrating over and over and over again a profound mercy for those in need—and Jesus is re-writing the religion of his day.

"Sacrifice" might be understood as going along with what the law proscribes—all those DO NOT's.

Don't touch dead people. Don't touch persons who are issuing blood. Don't steal, don't kill, don't commit adultery.

But again and again, Jesus reminds us that law was made for humans, not humans for the law.

That is why Jesus is bold enough to heal persons on the Sabbath, even though that would be considered “work” and so is a “no no.”

But the point is that “mercy” is to be paramount, and our obedience to the law, what might be classified as our “sacrifice,” our obedience to the law needs sometimes to be revisited in light of circumstances.

And this is what Jesus is doing in his ministry.

This is why Jesus’ hashtag is #gluttonanddrunkard.

Not that Jesus is necessarily a glutton and drunkard, but because Jesus does not conform to the what the religious powers that be understood as “obedience” to God.

If Jesus is God’s Son, he has a strange way of showing, so think the Pharisees, for Jesus is radically disobedient so it appears.

He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He touches dead people and bleeding persons. He engages with persons who are ritually unclean.

PAUSE

And so, ultimately, what does all this say to us?

Just this, that “mercy” is to be our compass in life, even if demonstrating mercy stands out in stark contrast to the thinking of those around us.

And for me, the most powerful example of “mercy” that just doesn’t make sense, is whenever persons, typically first responders—EMT personnel, firefighters, police officers, but it can be anyone—rush towards a disaster.

Think of those persons who rushed toward the burning towers of the World Trade Center. But it can be any disaster really.

That doesn’t make sense. It makes more sense to run away from a disaster, not towards it.

But here you have people who are moved by the power of mercy in a most profound way.

And when I see such a witness of people rushing toward a disaster, I can’t help but equate it to what the human body does when it experiences a cut or wound.

Blood rushes to the spot and platelets in the blood allow for the process of healing to begin, by causing blood to clot.

The human family does a similar thing—rushing persons towards a disaster site. And it is a profound witness of mercy.

We are all called to do this, you and me. Maybe not to be an EMT or firefighter or police officer.

But we are called to be an agent of mercy wherever we see there is need for compassion and healing.

This is after all what God did for all of us.

God observed the need of the world for healing from sin and death, and God rushed God's very self in the person of his Son Jesus Christ to the disaster site, namely this world of God's creation.

And God brings God's mercy and compassion and healing by the power of the cross and resurrection.

And so maybe, maybe an even better hashtag for Jesus than #gluttonanddrunkard is #mercy.

But tweets are not enough. No, the very best way for that cause of mercy to be publicized, is for all of us, who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, to live out that cause of mercy each and every day.

And when that is done, the day will arise when we will all be able to tweet #thanksbetogod. AMEN.