

Pastor's Sermon

Epiphany 7 February 23, 2025

What Kind of Christianity?

Why do we gather here each and every week? That is a question well worth asking. It is a reminder that we all need to think about. Week after week we come together to hear the Good News of the Gospel, to reconnect with teachings of Jesus, and to reflect on how those teachings shape our lives. The words of President John F. Kennedy remind us of why this question matters so deeply: *“The question is not whether all men (and women) are brothers (and sisters). That question has been answered by the God who placed us on this earth together. The question is whether we have the strength and the will to make the brotherhood of man the guiding principle of our daily lives.”*

Our world often feels chaotic and divided. Worship helps us to re-center ourselves on what truly matters, God's love. How that love impacts our world through Jesus is our shared calling. We are called to embody that love. At its core, this sounds simple. But as we know too well, living it out is anything but simple.

Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to extend grace even to our enemies. Jesus calls us to walk humbly, to show mercy, to share kindness in all we do. Jesus teaches us to seek first the Kingdom of God, a kingdom defined not by power and prestige. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that the Kingdom of God requires us to say no to all injustice, all evil, all lies, and all oppression.

Every one of us knows how challenging it is to put these teachings into practice. We feel a constant tug within as we try to be faithful Christians yet try to survive in the real world. One part of us is drawn to the Gospel mandate toward humility, love, and selflessness. The other part of us is shaped by the pressures of this world to seek comfort, control, and the easy way out.

Martin Luther described this as *Anfechtung*, tribulation, challenge, the war within us. The battle between what is holy and what is of the world. This isn't necessarily a flaw in our faith. It is a fundamental part of being human. We are saint and sinner all at once. That is why we need to gather, not so we

become perfect on our own, but to be perfected in Christ. We live in between two kingdoms – the Kingdom of this World and the Kingdom of God. I remember as a child there was a cartoon that graphically displayed this dilemma. On one shoulder was an angel encouraging the hero to do what is right. On the other shoulder was a devil urging the hero to do what was wrong.

We come together as the Church. Christianity, we call it. In our country we hear the cry from some that America should be a Christian nation. The question before us is “What kind Christianity will we choose to be?”

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the Crusades? That called for murdering thousands of people who refused to accept Christian faith?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of 1940's Germany 1940? That called for the complete elimination of all Jews in the name of Jesus?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the colonizers? That justified the extermination of indigenous people in name of Christ?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the misogynists? That calls for the repeal of the 19th Amendment which grants women the right to vote?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the slave trader? That justifies the killing and enslavement of millions of Africans because the Bible has instructions on how to treat your slaves in the name of Christ?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of Bull Connor? A deacon and Sunday School teacher who unleashed dogs on people protesting to get their right to vote.

Do we want the kind of Christianity of Churches that gather outside Pride Festivals Shouting with bull horns that God hates fags?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod? That declares that women can't be preach or be pastors?

Do we want the kind of Christianity of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod? That states that women can't even vote on church matters.

What kind of Christianity does Jesus want? The Gospel this morning tells us explicitly. It's kind of a job description. Jesus says to those wanting to be disciples, “But I say to you love your enemies.” That's pretty clear; he even says it two times. And just in case we don't get it, he adds, “Do good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.

Do good even to sinners. Do not judge or condemn. Above all forgive.” That doesn’t mean that we just lay down and take it. This is a call to action. It means challenging our oppressors with love and concern.

Implausible? Impossible? One only has to look at history to see how radical love has changed much in the world. In East Germany, gatherings in churches became mass candlelight marches which soon began the process that overthrew the Communist regime and broke down the Berlin Wall. In Liberia, thousands of Christians and Muslim women banded together to end a brutal civil war. In the United States we witnessed Black churches foster nonviolent civil rights marches and sit-ins that eventually resulted in important legislative accomplishments opening a new world of opportunities for many.

What kind Christianity do you want? Every one of you in this room would answer “follow the teachings of Jesus.” But we do really follow Jesus or do we twist those teachings to fit the agendas we encounter in our broken world?

Jesus makes it clear in this Sermon on the Plain. There are two kinds of people in this world: neighbors and we are supposed love them and enemies and we are supposed to love them. Amen!