

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: June 25, 2023

“Diversity and Love”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this Fourth Sunday after Pentecost. It seems our readings today have one thing in common that is not really obvious until you take a closer look.

In our Old Testament reading we have the story of Ismael and his mother being left to fend for themselves after jealousy erupted within Abraham’s household with two sons from different women. Obviously, this was not a time when the phrase “baby momma” held any place in their society. But rather than focusing on the people in this scripture, I would like to focus on the work of God.

If you look closely at our reading from Genesis, Hagar is promised the same promise given to Abraham: that her offspring would found a nation. Well, for Abraham and Sarah, his son too would become the founder of a nation. From Abraham we have the beginnings of both Judaism and (through Ismael) the beginning of the nation of Islam.

What does that tell us about God? What I believe this actually shows us, is that God loves diversity. God did not take Ismael’s life, but instead saved it and began another faith tradition down the line.

What we have in our Gospel today is Jesus declaring he did not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword. For Jesus these are very scary words, but are they? If

God embraces all of his creation and obviously allows diversity within worship, why would Jesus say these scary words?

In today's Gospel we now introduce another faith tradition. After Jesus dies on the cross, these Jews will become Christians after having witnessed the resurrection. Thus, the three Biblical/Abrahamic traditions are complete: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

People tend to create God in their own image. They have difficulty accepting that there are many ways to worship God. In fact there are many various words used to describe God, and there is a very good chance that none of them are completely right, yet none of them are completely wrong. However, people have difficulty with that. Sometimes it is ok to not have all the answers.

Jesus is talking to his disciples about the reality of what he is bringing into the world. Jesus does not reject the Samaritan woman, he eats with sinners and tax collectors, he even heals people on the Sabbath. This is all to say to his fellow righteous: your tradition is lovely, but it is not all there is.

God is bigger than the God you created with your rules. Basically, God wants us all to love one another no matter where you come from or what your belief is. God is bigger and more merciful than all that. God did not leave Ismael to die; God did not allow Abraham to kill Isaac as a sacrifice - instead he provided a ram. And God did not kill Jesus; however, people did. It is so difficult to accept a loving God that loves all of his creation - humans have gone to have wars over this concept.

But believing in a God that is loving and merciful causes problems. As seen throughout various stories in the Bible, even within the Hebrew tribes themselves,

there were tensions. So not only during Jesus' time was loving someone who was different a problem, but even with all his teachings and explaining Jesus knew there would be tensions. It would even go as deeply as what most of us consider our safe place, family.

Just as America had its red line districts and the family's approval is often needed for a marriage (with desire for one faith tradition to be continued in a household), when diversity is welcome, basically all hell can break loose.

Most of you probably remember the 1967 movie "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" I believe there was also a remake. The plot involves a white girl bringing her date home who happens to be a black man. Now it just as easily could have been a young man bringing home another young man, or a Catholic household trying to welcome a Hindu. Our minds suddenly go, "Oh ,no! We may have a foe as a member of our own household."

Now Jesus tells us that we can expect conflict even within our family when we live by faith in Christ. The grown person who chooses Jesus may no longer want to participate in religious practices held dear by their parents. The husband or wife who chooses Jesus will want to attend worship on Sunday mornings when their family might prefer them to be elsewhere. The wage earner who chooses Jesus may find it necessary to choose work that involves less compromise and a more moral stance, but also offers less pay.

Faith in Christ impacts every aspect of our lives, from the way that we conceive our children to the way that we bury our dead. It is no wonder that, when other members of the family do not share our faith, they may resent us and may become

angry, resulting in tension. Jesus is telling them, bring love to your world, and that by doing that there is a price.

It is not the differences God is calling us to see, but instead the similarities. It is not war that Jesus is calling us to, but the awareness that most of us have difficulty with those who are different from us, even in the light of love. And as we know throughout history, those who have truly followed Jesus have paid the price.

We live in a “What’s in it for me!” kind of world where we are tempted to focus on what we can get rather than what we can give. We tend to focus on who is in or who is out. Jesus tells us that such behavior is ruinous in the long run—such people will lose their lives. We see it even in the short run. Truly happy people are those who live for something larger than themselves. But in today’s world we can no longer stop there. Jesus is telling us to focus on him, focus on God, look not to each other but to the bigger picture, to our creator.

We are called to live into Jesus’ teachings. We are called to accept others, to love our neighbor. I doubt any one of us will go to jail for our beliefs, but others have. You may feel like this scripture no longer speaks to us today, but it does. You may feel you have no power to change things, but you do. You can volunteer where you are needed, you can spread love by who you work with, interact with and accept. You can vote, not just in your own interest, but also in regard to those who are struggling.

You are called not to just voice your knowledge of Jesus, but to act like Jesus. God will keep creating and allowing diversity to live. Our hearts need to grow to accept that. Happy Pride Day for San Francisco and Amen.