

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Third Sunday after Pentecost: June 26, 2022

“Freedom”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Third Sunday after Pentecost and what the church calls “Ordinary Time” however, we don’t live in ordinary times, in case you haven’t seen the news. But there is one thing that is eternal, and that is God’s love and how God has designed us to live in relationship with Him and each other.

Not long after 9/11, the Twin Towers maybe a little too fresh in everyone’s mind, I had a friend ask me, “what would you do if we are taken over by a Muslim regime? What if there was Sharia law? What would you do?”

I thought this over before I answered, I was at the time, just going back to school to pursue the priesthood, my daughter was a tween, I was grooming dogs for a living. What would happen, I am after all, female, Christian to a noticeable degree, and happily a single mom.

After a moment I replied, I guess I would do what they told me to do. My friend looked at me appalled. She then went on a rant about protests, and hunger strikes, and to be honest, I totally understood her point. For just a moment I almost was sucked into this vengeful anger which could very easily been not only condoned, but considered righteous.

I thought a bit more and then nodded my head, yes, I would do what they told me. I understand your point, but I am not that person. I want to survive, I want to teach the next generation.

So here we are in our country with laws and rulings being overturned, big political shifts, tension and division in the air, all while trying to survive a very cruel economy. And what are most of us doing? We are, I hope, moving forward in a way that works for us. I am truly striving to live the Gospel, the good news, and I am hoping this is your goal too. Searching for a peaceful heart amidst the turmoil.

Jesus' story tells us plainly that there will always be betrayal, it happened to him, buy his best friend. He shows us that religious law and government are not good bedfellows and in their struggle for power, the people they are responsible for - suffer. Jesus' world was not our world in so many ways, but yet, similar. Religious factions, power struggles, starving people.

In Jesus, the law is simplified: Love God, Love Self, Love Neighbor. All the rituals, the dos and don'ts of the Torah, were confining rather than freeing. When released from such orders, we are free to break Sabbath law to heal, free from dress codes and hierarchy to invite all to the banquet, free from allowing the things that get in the way of doing what we know is right to stop us from following our conscience.

We are losing a whole generation of Holocaust survivors as they age their way back to spirit, and those like Ghandi, or Thich Nhat Hahn, Elie Wiesel, Martin

Luther King and so many who, like Jesus could conjure up peace in their hearts as well as a fire for justice all while living in turbulent times, under terrible conditions. We will miss their guidance and their stories.

“For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”

“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.” Remember if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now this does not mean that if you declare your faith to Jesus to the cop who pulls you over for running a red light that the law does not apply to you, instead it means quite the opposite.

If you are to love one another, you actually would never think of speeding because you might hurt another person. You wouldn't act recklessly with love because you wouldn't want to break another's heart (that's the church way of warning you of the consequences of a one night stand), but point being is that the law of compassion encompasses so much more than some legality. It takes in accountability.

The only way to fight evil and ugliness is with love and beauty. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. For those in our Compassion class, this list is considered the *Unmeasurables*. “There is no law against such things.”

As Jesus has told us, kingdoms on earth will come and go, laws will be written and rescinded, and within this process is a lot of fear, pain and division. But we get to

choose the way we want to react, and that way is with love, joy peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Jesus himself was not ordained, he held no position in the Temple, he held no power in the community. He never killed a person, or even threaten to do so, he was hospitable, and kind, and the only thing that angered him was injustice in the Temple that was forcing people to buy their salvation. Meaning the only thing that matters is people's access to a relationship with God.

And in all this, Jesus did not change Rome. That was why they couldn't see the Messiah when they looked at him. He never changed Rome, he didn't change the Temple priests, but he has changed hearts and souls around the World for centuries. He changed me, and I am hoping he changes you.

Back to my friend's original question, I referred her to the old statement that I love but really and truthfully don't know where I heard this dialogue about Queen Elizabeth the First, but it really struck me. Actually it could have even been a movie, but it was a statement about using the Prayerbook when the division of Catholic and Protestant was steeped in blood shed.

The statement went something like this, "we will all use the prayer book and follow its recommendations for worship, however what people believe in their hearts is their own business, if we leave it at that we will have more unity and hopefully peace."

The peace that surpasses understanding. The mindfulness to be in the present moment, the breath you take before you react to something badly, living a life of compassion is the Christ way, is the life, and is the truth, and this will set us free. And the interesting thing is, we can learn to live out our lives this way through anything.

Human rights will come and go, as they always have when considering whoever is in charge - just ask anyone who lives on the margins. But our faith can strengthen us to get through anything; and living from a place of compassion can bring us our own solace in troubled times, and set us free. Amen