

Sunday, June 10, 2018

Lectionary 10

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus would bake the Cake

Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1; Mark 3:20-35

Delivered to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

1301 N. Broom St Wilmington DE 19806

Rev. Jason Churchill

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable
in your sight o God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Amen

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

Abraham Lincoln said those words in the capital of my home state of Illinois...“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

His close friend and law partner William Herndon said this was perhaps one of the most courageous speeches...and also the most politically incorrect statement.

Lincoln was just nominated to run for the US Senate from the State of Illinois against Stephen Douglas.

Lincoln was talking about the issue of slavery in America - where the northern half of the country instituted freedom for Africans and the South used this barbaric institution to bolster their economy.

Lincoln was advocating for one united focus for the country, one United States that speaks with one voice.

He admitted that he believed that “this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. [He did] not expect the Union to be dissolved -- [nor] expect the house to fall -- but [he did] expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other,” he said.

Lincoln knew he was using the words of Jesus here, as did any person listening to him at that time...and while I tend to shy away from the extremes of black and white - and tend to find not just myself, but my theology in the vast and infant shades of grey, Lincoln and I couldn't agree more...when it comes to equality, freedom, and the liberation from oppression...there can not be any shades of grey.

There either is equality - or - there is not.

The Supreme Court bravely ruled that even in the cases of separate but equal situations...the separation is inherently unequal.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

The speech had many repercussions, giving Lincoln's opponent far too much ammunition. His friend and legal partner Herndon said, "when I saw Senator Douglas making such headway against Mr. Lincoln's house divided speech I was nettled & irritable, and said to Mr. Lincoln one day this -- 'Mr. Lincoln -- why in the world do you not say to Mr. Douglas, when he is making capitol out of your speech, -- 'Douglas why whine and complain to me because of that speech. I am not the author of it. God is. Go and whine and complain to Him for its revelation, and utterance.'

God is the author of this and God is the one that sent Christ to us to learn how to love and how to position our faith to be the only possible way for the oppressed to be free and liberated from the bonds of inequality and un-holy oppression.

This was in 1858 ... and Lincoln lost his race for Senate against Mr. Douglas.

Faith in the power of God - and the courage to speak truth to lies...injustice to the unjust...to literally stare into the face of evil and call it for what it is, does not guarantee you victory in this earthly realm.

It does not guarantee that you will win the battle, but it will secure an everlasting victory in the war that will see an end to unjust laws, un-Godly bigotry, and oppression of all sorts.

Thinking on it several years later, Herndon said the speech did awaken the people, and despite Lincoln's defeat, he thought the speech made him President. "Through logic inductively seen," he said, "Lincoln as a statesman, and political philosopher, announced an eternal truth -- not only as broad as America, but covers the world."

It recalls eighty years prior: “we hold these truths to be self evident that all are created equal.” Praise God for the glory that all are created equal in God’s grace-filled eyes.

“Yes, everything is for your sake,” Paul said, “so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.”

Liberation in the here and now is perhaps one of the most potent examples and representations of the Grace of God on earth.

The Grace of God that freed enslaved people, the Grace of God that will look in the face of racism and call it evil, and the same Grace of God that would not only see Jesus baking the cake...but God eating with the two gentlemen on their wedding day...celebrating and reveling in the happiness of their marriage and commitment to one another and the church!

This is the Grace Martin Luther spoke of, this is the Grace Jesus gave, this is the Grace we struggle to extend...but struggle we do.

It is the grace of God that gives us the ability to come together with many viewpoints but one purpose...to extend the love of God to one another and to those that have yet to understand what love is.

I have spoken with nearly a dozen people after the Supreme Court ruling...some are here with us now...and I want to ensure you that my faith in God and the grace I know that is Jesus Christ incarnate tells me the same thing it told Lincoln almost 160 years to the day...“a house divided against itself cannot stand” and it will not stand.

It cannot and will not stand because the Kingdom of Heaven is not divided.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the ultimate practice of liberation and love and compassion...and that will be the rule of law, not a vague decision by a mere nine people.

In the end of the Gospel today Jesus did not go on to insult or disrespect his mother and brothers, rather he signified a unique but undeniably important change in the way we view the human household...

Those that do the work of God are, in fact, the ones that are invited into the family of Jesus.

When you do the work of God, when you stand for God...even if it means you will not necessarily win the earthly prize...you are one of God's very beloved children. When you stand for freedom and liberation in the name of God, then you are part of the beloved family.

Wait for the Lord, our Psalm tells us today, “wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love.”

As you wait, love one another as Christ loved us...for it is there that you will get the ultimate glimpse of the heavenly kingdom and a sense of the liberation we find in Jesus Christ.