

06/09/2024 Pentecost 3B – Lectionary 10

Have you noticed that some people feel called to put themselves in the middle of conflict? Sometimes those of us are transitional or interim pastors can find ourselves there. I have seen some people run from it and others run to it. I feel that I am some place in between the two.

My husband and I were members of a church where I began being the director of the contemporary group. We did worship every Sunday. The pastor retired and he had not dealt with conflict the entire time that he was there. 2 Interim pastors came. One took the regular pastoral responsibilities, and he ran from conflict and the other did the transition work and she ran to it.

I did my best to only observe. The transitional pastor actually helped form and put together the training for the intentional interim pastors. One needs to understand that there will be conflict and disagreements. It takes the ability to separate out yourself and set boundary lines. One needs to have the ability to listen to all people.

Conflict is normal and you have experienced it here. It is interesting what we chose to dig our heels in on. Often we have the support of our families in our individual lives when we experience conflict. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus did not. He was causing such a stir among the church leaders that his family felt he was making them look bad.

His family did not understand at this point who he really was and what he had been called to do. Maybe you have had a family member at one time, or another pull you aside and ask you if you really wanted to die on this hill. Depending on how you felt about it, you may have considered it and backed down or felt your were called to continue.

Jesus' family were to the point that they wanted to restrain him and probably take him home as people thought he was crazy. Then came the church leaders who put him in league with the ruler of the demons as Jesus had been casting out demons. Jesus of course challenged them and asked them, "How could satan cast out satan?" If one is casting out the other, the house is divided and will fall. If satan has risen up against himself, how can he stand?

Jesus had reduced the church leaders thinking to absurdity. He goes on to say that if anyone enters a strong person's house, the strong person being satan, cannot take their property unless they are tied up. Jesus is separating himself from satan by saying that he is stronger than satan.

He becomes bolder and says that everyone's sins are forgiven except those that put he and satan in league together. The Greek word translated never here is not a good translation as recent scholars have felt it is misleading. Jesus has always said that forgiveness is for all, but it needs to be received. If satan does not give forgiveness and one equates Jesus with satan, why would you be looking for forgiveness.

In a sense Jesus now turns on his family as when they came to call him out and probably expect to take him home, Jesus asks the question, "who is my family?". I'm sure this threw everyone for a loop. He then said to them my family are those who do God's will. Of course this could have included his biological family.

What is Jesus trying to teach in all of this turmoil and misunderstanding? Could it be that Jesus is trying to tell all of them and us that not everyone will agree or understand what Jesus is saying and doing? Jesus is describing what the beloved community looks like.

There are many different variations on this picture, but in the end not everyone will see things the same way. We will have many misunderstandings. Messages will not always be clear. What one sees may be different from another and the interpretations can be different. Does this sound familiar?

Ramona described a church that she belonged to that ended up closing. But through the years, even though there were many different ways of thinking, they worked together to try and move the church forward. It wasn't meant to be and I'm sure there were many disagreements and misunderstandings, but they stayed together until it was a congregational decision to close before all of the resources were gone. They chose then to share their resources with other ministries. This is what beloved community is about.

Jesus calls us into beloved community. We all come from different places. Our experiences are different. Jesus calls us to listen to each other. When we make things about what I want, it is very easy to miss what Jesus wants. I always try to think about what is best for the community and sometimes I fail at this.

The beloved community has a place for everyone, yet it is not about conformity. Thus, when we say we want to grow and new people come through the doors, I would anticipate new ideas and we are called to try and welcome the people and their ideas. If people do not experience this welcome, they will stop sharing their ideas and find a place that will welcome them and hear their ideas.

Growth does not come by doing things the same way all the time. One of the directions that has come out of our conversations this past year is to provide

opportunities to connect directly with and serve the community. Faith has some great ministries to serve the community, but how is Faith directly connecting with the community. What opportunities are being provided for this direct connection?

One opportunity to connect directly with the community is being offered by the RIC committee. On Pride Day in Meridian Township on August 10, there will be an ecumenical Pride service in the morning. In the late afternoon we will again have a table at the Market Place on the Green Pavilion. We will be asking for volunteers to be available at the table to give things out and have information about Faith Lutheran Church. It will also be a time that others can experience the welcome that we have to offer.

Connecting with the community can bring in new people, backgrounds and ideas. This seems to be what has been spoken, but are there any measurable goals to make this happen? I understand this takes time, money and effort. The question becomes how is God calling Faith Lutheran Church to directly connect with the community?

The transition team will be recommending to the council to develop a measurable goal as to discern how God wants Faith to directly connect with the community. Since not a great deal of this is happening right now, there will be new things to do.

Today we will be burning the mortgage to the property that we just sold. Eventually the hope is that apartments will be built. This can create opportunities for Faith to directly connect with the community.

Beloved community is about seeing Christ in other people. We know that is not always easy to do. This takes work, humbleness and intention. Being in beloved community means change.

Jesus is reminding us today that he calls each one of us into beloved community. Sometimes it gets messy. This is when we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. Messiness causes us to have to make decisions that are not easy. Jesus says make them for the sake of the community.

At the heart of beloved community is agape, sacrificial love. Jesus demonstrated what that looked like in the way he lived his life. When we are feeling uneasy, angry or uncertain, we can remember that we are not alone in the messiness of life. Jesus walks with each one of us because he loves us.

Let us pray: God of chaos and peace, there are times in our lives and the life of our beloved community that things get messy. Jesus reminds us today that this is normal. It doesn't always make us feel comfortable, but we thank you that you don't leave us to fend for ourselves.

In our beloved community, we ask that your Holy Spirit would continue to lead and guide us. Give wisdom and guidance to our leaders as move forward. In Jesus' name. Amen