

Reformation Sunday

Another incident of gun violence in Maine. Israel has begun stage 2 their ground attack. We have a new Speaker of the House. People have all different ways of viewing these things. Christians have different ways of viewing these things. Thus, what is the churches' role in all of these things.

Some would say stay out of it. Can we do that if we are commanded to love our neighbor when our neighbor includes everyone? Our neighbors are affected by gun violence, whatever decisions the House now makes, and innocent people are being killed and dying in the Israel/Hamas conflict.

I would not tell you how to act on these things, but I will suggest through what lens to view them. Feelings are involved in all of these things and as much as they can give energy, they can also skew our lens in which to view them. So, what role does the church play in these things? I do not believe that the church should tell us what to believe about these things, but rather who to believe in, in order to see what our role and view of them is.

In the gospel of John, Jesus tells us that the way to God is through Him. First of all, we are told that Jesus was from the beginning, in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God and became flesh and stayed with us for a while. Jesus goes on to say that he is the way, the truth and the life and he is the only way to God. In today's Gospel lesson we are told that if we abide in the Word, we will truly be Jesus' disciples and we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

There is a great deal packed into these two verses. Jesus is the Word, and we are called to abide in Jesus. When I think of abide I think of embracing. We can embrace in different amounts of strength and energy.

So today I would like us to think about embracing Jesus the Word with as much strength and energy as we can. Jesus has also told us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. With what kind of strength and energy do we embrace Jesus. It will be different in different times of our life and can be different every day and hour.

With the amount of strength and energy that we embrace Jesus, will be how clearly we are able to see what Jesus wants us to see and then act. This is an individual journey that then intersects with others in the body of Christ. As we share what we learn through embracing the word with each other, Jesus' vision for us as individuals and as a community of faith can become clearer.

It is in this relationship with Jesus, embracing the word, Jesus, that we can discover the truth and experience freedom to love our neighbor. We still may not view all things in the same way, but we will be at a better place to listen and see Jesus in our neighbors. Martin Luther taught this. This is what I believe allows us to love our neighbor better as we have been commanded to do.

For me embracing the Word is about a relationship with Jesus, both personal and corporate. Each one of us are in relationship with a number of people. We gauge how much we embrace these relationships. Those closest to us get more strength and energy in our embrace.

We all have experience embracing people. What does that look like for us? It has to do with amount of time and the quality of it. There is only so much time in each day, thus we do have to make choices. When it comes to family and close friends it also has to do with the time that we are not physically present with them. Are we thinking about them, does our behavior represent them well, let alone ourselves?

It is difficult to embrace someone fully without seeing them, but that is what God in Jesus Christ is asking us to do. God's history with God's creation says that we can trust this relationship. God has given us the tools we need to live with each other. Unfortunately, we need reminders of this all the time. We as human beings do not learn very well from history.

Since it is Reformation Sunday, it is always good to hear what Luther has to say about the Word. Martin Luther felt that the Word was the fundamental reality from which everything follows. For Luther this included tangible, material reality. As I mentioned earlier, he also said that we should see Christ in our neighbor.

This does not mean only our Christian neighbors. Thus, when we look at gun violence, world conflicts and work of our government, do we see Christ at work? To God in Jesus Christ, the shooters in gun violence, the new speaker of the house and people on both sides of the Israel/Hamas conflict are important to God in Jesus Christ. No matter what party you identify with, we are asked to see Christ in the new speaker of the house. Some will say yes of course, others may say not with his history on some issues, but God calls us to look for Christ in him. The conflict between Hamas and Israel includes many other people. We are asked to see Christ in all of them.

Through our human eyes we can't see Christ in everyone, but through Jesus' eyes and trying to see Jesus in our neighbor it is possible. I believe this is what will reduce the hate in this world, the insecurity in this world, the desire to always have power and control. We are called to embrace the Word, Jesus.

When we embrace the Word, Jesus, it will give us more of the ability to see the truth. The truth can empower us and show love to our neighbor. The ability to see more clearly also means then that we will be able to see what does not line up with Jesus through what we can see. When actions and words do not line up with loving our neighbor, it is sin.

This is where we need to be careful. We do not determine someone's salvation. We are not the judge either. God in Jesus Christ has already done this. We are, however, called to speak out about what we see, but in love.

I am asking you to view people and issues through Jesus' eyes. He is the Word. When we embrace Him through the study of the written Word and then ask and listen we can see more clearly what is right for us. It is important to remember it is still about living in community and what is best for it. We have been commanded to love our neighbor

This community of faith has, through Jesus' eyes, has seen, chosen and has stated that all people are to be loved and accepted. You have seen through Jesus' eyes as individuals and then as a community that this is what we are called to do. We have embraced the Word, Jesus, to come to this belief.

In looking at what is going on in our country and world, this then informs our role and view. When we look at our neighbor through the eyes of retribution, and taking away power and control and viewing others as less than, which puts our neighbor in a negative, non-loving light. As human beings we are capable of this.

I cannot fully tell you what to see in your view, but what I am asking you to do is to embrace the Word, Jesus. Spend time with Jesus the person and written word as it is all Jesus. This is what gives us more of the ability to see more clearly what our role is and the role of the church as we navigate such issues as gun violence, the government and the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

I believe that we do have a choice of how we view our neighbor. It is not easy as our neighbors often say or do things that is not what we are seeing. Remember that we are someone's neighbor also.

Today I am challenging us to embrace the Word, Jesus Christ with great strength and energy and then we will be free to love our neighbor as we have been commanded to do by God in Jesus Christ.