

## Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

The “I’s” have it. Unless “I” see. Unless “I” touch the wounds. Unless “I” understand, “I” will not believe. “I” want things to be the way “I” want them to be.

We live in a world filled with the sinful self. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they entered into a whole new way of seeing things and it was not good. We have lived with that curse ever since. You and “I” have our idea of how things ought to be. You and “I” do not know what we are doing.

The devil divides and conquers. Jesus forgives and unites. You have seen the reality of this tug-of-war played out not only in this place, but it has happened all around the world time after time. What is the difference between a healthy fellowship and an unhealthy one? “I” will tell you – and that is the definition of an unhealthy start.

Jesus loves everybody. We are to love everybody. Jesus does not give everyone what they want. We should not try to please all people. In fact, Jesus made it very simple for us. We are to please the Father. What must we do as a fellowship? The answer is simple, “What is pleasing to the Father?” “I” don’t have the answer to that question, so let us go to the Father in prayer.

The Lord has a reason for everything He does. Our hope, my hope, should always be based upon the simplicity of what we pray each week, “Thy will be done on earth, through us, in me, as it shall be done in heaven.” To believe and act as if “I” have free will is to immediately jump to the place that has made a mess of this world.

When the church was founded, it immediately went to the place where they held all things in common. We have a name for it, it is called socialism. I can see the hairs on your neck rising. I suspect that heaven will look a lot like that. The problem with socialism in this age is that we all are sinners. Sinners all have a god, it is the god of “I”. No, I have no problem with looking out for number one. The sinner thinks themselves as number one. Scripture and the Lord tells us that He is number One. There is the rub. Either you are going to be number one, or you will come to the place where you know He is number One. “You shall have no other gods before Me,” says the Lord.

This helps us to understand the difference between heaven and hell. All I understand about heaven is that Jesus will be there. I have hope for others who might also be there, but I want to be with Jesus and see Him face to face. All I understand about hell is that the Lord will not be there. It will be all of the individuals who think of themselves as the center of all things.

If we follow the Lord, we then realize that everything we call our own really belongs to Him. The Lord holds all things in common. This is why we help others in ministry. When we give to one in need, it is called justice. When we give to one who will abuse our charity, it is called grace. The goal in ministry always remains the same. All that we do should not only be pleasing to the Father, but also with the goal of uniting each person with their Lord, Savior, and God, Jesus.

Life is meant to be lived. It is in the living that we learn, grow, and have our being. The Lord has created us to be social beings. We do His work through fellowship and ministry. Whether it is a fellowship of carousing, hedonism, or worldly things, selling “My” idea of how life is to be lived, or a fellowship of those who seek God’s word and the Lord Himself as the center, we all demonstrate our God given inclination to gather together and be of like mind. What we do in everyday life is our ministry, whether it is for God, or for “I”.

Our world is quickly fracturing as it is coming together. The differences between places, evident one hundred years ago, are quickly merging into sameness everywhere. Whether it is downtown Detroit or downtown Delhi, it is quickly looking the same. But also, the culture is angrier as people want their own ideas of things to be the standard. The world is fracturing as it appears to be uniting. Christ is and must be the standard. To hope otherwise is to hope in disintegration. Yes we were created to serve one king. Either it will be the prince of this world, or the King of kings.

Do not think that we are in a new age. We are not. When Thomas finally made it to the upper room – even there, the inclination was to gather in fellowship – he came with all of his neurosis, failures, and dashed hopes. It sure seems to me that he was angry. Was he angry at being left out by the supposed appearing of Jesus? Was he angry that Jesus did not meet his expectations? I don't know. Rather than focus upon Thomas, or anyone else for that matter, we must focus upon Jesus. While the world seeks to pull us apart, Jesus has come to bring us together. "Father, make them one even as we are one."

We have heard how Thomas was instantly transformed from being unbelieving to believing with His encounter with Jesus. Every true encounter with Jesus has the same effect. Jesus is our Lord. Jesus is God, the only Begotten Son. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. "I" struggle with this. So do you. "I" think I know what is best and so "I" am off and running straight into divisive behavior. The old Adam must die. Yes, "I" am in bondage to sin and cannot free myself. So, I confess, knowing that God is faithful and just and will forgive my sin.

A word of warning here. If you truly repent, know that God will hang the old sinner on the cross with Jesus so that the sin may die with Him. "I" must die to sin, death, and the devil every day. The "I" in you must also do this. A part of who we are, if we are to be faithful, is to understand that wherever we encounter the unholy trinity of "Me," "Myself," and "I," we are to point to the words we say each week as we begin with confession. If you repent, your sins have been forgiven and there is great purpose in this. He will make of you what He will. "I" am the clay and He is the potter.

The Father sent me here. He sent me to preach the Good News, bind up the broken hearted, and bring the healing of Jesus to all who will receive the hope of the resurrection. Anything beyond this, most likely, falls into the expectations of the "I" that dominates this age. The Lord has knit together a wonderful fellowship here, which the wicked one seeks to tear apart. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," Jesus said. That is why we end each service with, "Go in peace, serve the Lord." These are not liturgical words, but the command of the Lord. We are to go out into the world and be Christ's servants to the world.

As this congregation enters into the place of discernment for her next pastor, repent of the "I" attitude that asks, "Pastor, what are you going to do to . . ." I assure you the "I" in you will be disappointed eventually. Instead, think "How will we do ministry together?" We do hold ministry in common.

Jesus gathers us together in His upper room. He takes us with all of our foibles and He will make of us children of God. We have called Him Lord and Master, and that is right for He is, but He is also our friend. No greater love has one friend for another than that He is willing to lay down His life for His friend. Sisters and brothers, be not unbelieving, but believing. Because Jesus lives, we too shall live. He has breathed His breath upon us and there is new life in this

place. Do not look behind, for what is done. Look forward, for the Lord knows the plans He has for this fellowship. They are to prosper us and give us new life in the Risen Lord. The best is yet to come! Amen.