

4th Sunday after Pentecost
July 2/3, 2022

We have lived in a time where we are used to certain things being available and ready whenever we have need of them. We see the first signs of problems with what is called the supply chain is in its not supplying things. Lack of supply and increasing demand drive up prices. Behind this is a spiritual issue that is right before us. We have become used to having things right at our fingertips. Instant access to everything. By and large, having things the way we want them. If we continue the trail of where this is heading the way things are going, it is not hard to imagine that there will be no church in America sometime in the near future. I am not just talking about Good Shepherd, but about the whole country. Things have changed and if we do not meet the new situation, the faithful will become irrelevant and as they die off, the church will cease. Each generation is called to vigilant against overwhelming odds. Our foundation is Jesus Christ and the strength of what has been built is found in our vigilance in the faith. We are always only one generation from tyranny. We also know that Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away, but His word will never pass away. He calls for us to be a people of action.

The experiment of America is founded upon certain Christian understandings of humanity. I know that at least two of the founding fathers were not Christian, but they were very much influenced by the Gospel. The increasingly hostile-to-the-church world does not seem to want to understand this, but it was the culture at the time. The framing of the constitution was built upon a very fundamental principle and that is that humans are sinners. The checks and balances of our constitution is based upon checks and balances because people sin. Back in the day when they taught such things, we all heard that. By why the checks and balances? Because sinners sin and there are those who may begin with good intentions, but can be easily tempted to turn to evil. Hence, even if it is jealousy and greed which provides the check, it is there. That is why we were formed as a republic and not a democracy. A republic requires many to be involved. Democracy can quickly fall into mob rule which itself degrades into tyranny. At least, that is one of the lessons history is willing to teach us if we will learn. So also, in the church, Christ has given us the truth and if we are willing to listen, we may understand and walk in His ways. The church is neither a republic nor democracy, but a monarchy. Christ is King.

Jesus sends us out to serve others. It is not just about service, but about what the Holy Spirit grows in us and understanding that there is much that needs to be grown. We are born separated from God. God is holy, we are not. In fact, although we may not like the truth of the word, we are born in depravity. Even though this is true, we are called into His holiness. Each of us have gifts and a calling from the same Spirit. In our culture, we have been lulled into a daze of expectation. There are enough in this room to change the direction of our community and our nation. Jesus sent out seventy . . . yes, there are seventy in our midst . . . and the world has been changed. In the ebb and flow of culture, it is often the very few who believe the Gospel and live it that do change culture. It is having our hearts and minds on the things of the Lord such that we care a great deal about what happens in this age.

I think of Wilberforce and his friends who began what is now the global understanding that slavery is evil and this led to its demise internationally. The culture then saw him as a lunatic. But the law was changed. It happened in England and eventually in the United States. My point is that whenever a few faithful are willing to stand firm and against the prevailing wind of culture, change does happen. No, I am not calling for any kind of rebellion, but for us to actually hear and heed the word of our Lord. You never know what is going to happen when you actually try the Lord's obedience. If He asks us to go, then we go.

When we serve the Lord, we do not go with an attitude of expectation, but we do go with an attitude of anticipation. You know how the world thinks, “If I do this, that will happen.” Jesus commands us to go into the future with only one provision and that is to trust in Him. Sometimes, no, often, we will encounter rejection. Look at the present state of things. People all over the place are demanding that their idea of how they think things ought to be and think that these things should be mandated. Church folk have done this too. Jesus forbade that. If what you have to say (and do) is received, then bless those who receive you. If they will not receive you, then move on. Do you remember what happened in last week’s lesson? James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven and Jesus rebuked them. We are not here to change anyone’s minds. We are sent to share the Good News with all who will receive it. God is in control but does not control. The devil is not in control but controls whomever will listen to him.

Think about how many times we are lulled into inaction because we are afraid of failure. You know the saying, “If at first you do not succeed, try, try again.” This is not to inter into insanity where you try the same thing over and over expecting a different result, but having a willingness to go in the name of Christ and have Him guide you to accomplish what He will accomplish. The principle is simple, if even hard to implement. Be willing to take a first step. Know that the Lord encourages us to, and at the least – in the parable of the stewards – invest and not just bury what we have been given. It is not that we are earning anything, but that we are willingly obeying what the Lord commands. Through that willing obedience, He teaches us what we need to know. Our Lord told us that He desires compassion and not sacrifice.

Take a look around you. Is all well in your family, community, state, nation, and the world? Do I even need to ask this question? Jesus said the harvest is ripe, but the workers are few. Who are the workers? You are. Wait a minute, I am too . . . you fill in the blank. When you are retired from the Lord’s work I, or someone like me will be reading Scripture and saying a few words about your life to a crowd – hopefully mourning – at your funeral. Until then, there are things each of us can do. If we say we are a people of faith, then we are called by our Savior Jesus to go into the world. As Saint Paul said, we should not grow weary in doing good.

You know, in the early 1800s, with the dawning of the industrial revolution, most of the city folk worked six twelve hour days. On Sunday – their day of rest – many just stayed in bed. Their children played in the streets while they slept. A Christ-follower had an idea. What if we invite all of those children to come to the church and spend time with them and tell them about Jesus. What if, indeed. That is how Sunday School was invented. Mind you, Luther wrote the Catechism so that parents could teach their children. Few are the parents who do. Why, look at the public schools. Parents are often considered the enemy of education. Is it any wonder that children are against their parents? There is no time for lament. Maybe we can go back to the old idea of just inviting children off the streets in such a way that they have the opportunity to hear about Jesus. Many will not, but some might. This principle, initiated by Jesus, is always how the church has been built up.

We are not to rejoice over the numbers, but over the humble and simple truth that our names are written in the Lambs book. Not only that, but we need to seek for every opportunity to bring another into the fold. Do you not know that when one sinner repents, all of heaven rejoices. Let this be a lesson lest we think that it is about numbers. Jesus leads us in the power of One. One by one He adds to His body. We are called to follow the Lord wherever He leads. Are you willing? He is calling you to follow Him. Amen.