

NEVERTHELESS**(Luke 23: 32-43)**

Now that the election is over, and I am no longer in danger of violating our 501c3 status as a non-profit organization by being accused of trying to sway people's vote *against* one candidate or *for* another candidate—

Let me be clear as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ this morning, that it doesn't matter *who* you voted for, or *what* side of the various political or social or economic debates you are on; because no matter who you are, we are ALL in BIG TROUBLE!

If you happen to be a person who believes that diverse peoples have *nothing in common*, I have been sent here by the God of creation, justice, resurrection and love to tell you this morning that at least *one* thing the diverse peoples of this country *do NOW* have in common is that we are ALL now in the midst of some BIG TROUBLE in this land!

There is a Negro spiritual that reminds us that “*trouble don’t last always!*” My only addition to that thought this morning is “*but it sure is here now!*”

Please know—as I stand in this pulpit that has been dedicated as a sacred space to preach the love of God through Jesus Christ for ALL of God’s children—that what I speak is not my *biased political opinion*; it is my *considered theological belief!*

Because the result of Donald Trump becoming the president-elect of the United States has *already begun* to shape an environment in this country that in NO WAY represents ANYTHING that the gospel and the values of the kingdom of God have to offer.

- Mr. Trump has used the politics of ***hate—not love***—to demonize American citizens and people of other countries who belong to the Muslim religious faith; a religious faith, mind you, that in the eyes of God is JUST AS LEGITIMATE as Christianity, and historically, has even been LESS VIOLENT than Christianity;

- Mr. Trump has used the politics of ***division—not unity***—to increase racial and ethnic fears, divides, and violence among and against people who already have enough fears, divides and violence in our lives;
- Mr. Trump has used the politics of ***humiliation—not humility***—to attack anyone who would dare offend him with a *fact*; and has used and exploited the proliferation of “fake news” to further erode the educational and curiosity levels of a populace that is no longer on a search for anything that resembles truth;
- Mr. Trump has used the politics of ***misogyny—not responsible masculinity***—to publicly humiliate, shame, demean and despise women; the result being that we now have EVEN MORE little girls and EVEN MORE young women across this nation wondering how they should perceive themselves, and struggling EVEN MORE with their own self-esteem;

- Mr. Trump has used the politics of ***war—not peace***—to define what this country’s stance is going to be in its knee-jerk relationship to the rest of the world.

Make no mistake about it: it is INDEED my considered theological position and belief—as well, mind you, as the considered theological position and belief of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the denomination where most of us have our membership—that *religious hatred, racial and ethnic division, humiliation, misogyny, and war* are NOT the values of the kingdom of God that Jesus died on the cross for.

In fact, those just-mentioned values sound more like some of the reasons that Jesus got nailed to the cross in the *first* place...

NEVERTHELESS, these things are now once again part of our “politically correct” public discourse, right when many of us hoped that they perhaps were on their way out for good.

And make no mistake about it, that means BIG TROUBLE for ALL of us—the ones *doing* the discriminating AS WELL AS the ones who are being

discriminated *against*. Because we are NEVER our best selves when we are *hating* and *hurting* and *blaming* and *bullying* each other. And with Donald Trump as the president of our country, it is no secret that it is only going to get worse.

So, as one of your pastors, I strongly urge you to discern how you feel about those just-mentioned values through the lens of your Christian faith, and to decide if you are going to *defend* those values or *oppose* those values as they get played out in front of you in the public and private square. Because at some point, as a Christian, you will be called upon to do one or the other.

II.

On this Sunday that we intensely celebrate the *reign* of Christ over all the world, and its meaning for our lives today, it is instructive for us to have as our gospel lesson this morning, the *crucifixion* of Jesus. It comes up for us today under the general category of “*no cross, no crown.*” Because the cross is *always* a part of the royalty of Jesus. It

was on the cross that Jesus endured the terrible and terrifying agony of the naked sin, evil and brokenness that the world truly has to offer.

New Testament scholar Justo Gonzalez says it this way:

“At the cross, Jesus is confronting an evil reality that goes far beyond any human activity, plan, or conspiracy. Jesus is confronting the very structures of evil. In more traditional terms, Jesus is confronting the evil one himself, and all the powers he can muster, including the power of Rome and the subordinate power of the leadership in Jerusalem.”

Gonzalez is talking about the “powers and the principalities” that Paul speaks about in Ephesians; *“the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Eph. 6:12)—the things that we need the “whole armor of God” to fight against! They are a part of our reality whether we believe they are a part of our reality or not, and they were a huge part of the reason that Jesus ended up nailed to a cross, hanging there until he was dead.

NEVERTHELESS, the scriptures tell us that Jesus didn't stay dead, didn't stay defeated by the powers and principalities and rulers of cosmic darkness, but instead turned the tables on those powers and principalities, and did the defeating *himself* by being raised from death and vindicated by resurrection, ushering in the new age of the kingdom of God; an age where the powers and the principalities no longer roam about unchecked and unchallenged, because the Spirit of the Living God is making its presence and its power known!

It's an age that does not get ushered in without Jesus sacrificing his life and fighting the good fight of the faith so that we can ALL be free! It's an age that does not stay sustained unless we who profess Jesus as Lord stay busy fighting the fights for *others* that Jesus fought for *us*—the fights for the recognition of the love and dignity that God wants for us all!

III.

We have models in our own Lutheran history concerning speaking truth to power on the matter of God's love for all.

Martin Luther, during the time of the upheaval of the Reformation in the early 16th century, found it necessary to stand up to and disagree with the Pope and various theological counsels on the grace of God, and what it means for our theological understandings and beliefs. In his study of scripture, the Spirit showed Luther where Paul emphasized how we *“are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24), and “that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Romans 3:28).*

The Roman Catholic church of that day—which was prostituting itself by coming up with more and more ways to make people pay money to practice their Christian faith—wanted nothing to do with the words of their own sacred scripture, and excommunicated Luther from the church.

NEVERTHELESS, 500 years later, as we celebrate what was meant for evil that God used for good; we have finally reached the point in time and history where the Roman church is willing to admit that Luther's scripture work wasn't such bad work after all!

Just like it happened on the cross, God's love for ALL God's children—which is EVERYBODY—will prevail.

IV.

Or consider the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, teacher and scholar, who spent a year living and working in Harlem in the late 1930's, living among oppressed people of color, and worshipping in a black church, and recognizing that the point of the Christian faith is *people*, and that Christ is the collective person for us all—especially for those who are being oppressed.

Returning to his homeland of Germany just as Hitler's Third Reich began to turn Jesus into a divine representation of the ideal, racially pure Aryan, and allowed race-hate to become part of Germany's

religious life, Bonhoeffer decided to live out his faith, and stand up to Hitler's politics of *religious hatred, racial and ethnic division, humiliation, misogyny and war*. And for standing up and speaking God's truth to power—that those things have no place in the human community—Dietrich Bonhoeffer was tortured and hanged by Hitler's military.

A sad, tragic—yet faithful way for his life to end.

NEVERTHELESS, his living was not in vain, because not long after Bonhoeffer was tortured and killed living out his faith for others, Hitler's Germany was finally defeated, and many who were being oppressed began to be set free. It happened because there were those who just kept fighting the fights that Jesus fought; fights for a recognition of God's love for us ALL!

V.

And now—just like in Jesus’ day, and in Luther’s day, and in Bonhoeffer’s day—in THIS day the forces of evil continue to rear their ugly and divisive heads, and cause many to not even realize how they are participating in the constant and continuing oppression of a massive amount of God’s children. Jesus even prays on their behalf—and so should we—*“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

NEVERTHELESS, even in the midst of forgiveness, learning and repentance has to happen, so we who have announced to the world with our baptisms that “we have decided to follow Jesus” must speak truth to power, and teach them what the values of God’s kingdom really are—and what they really are not!

The kingdom of God is built on the recognition that God’s love is for ALL of God’s children—even if you don’t like them; even if you don’t agree

with them; even if you are afraid of them; even if you have never met them.

Let us who are on the battlefield for our Lord ALWAYS be ready to fight the good fight of the faith, for the sake of ALL of God's children— remembering that God is still on the throne, and that God's amazing and mighty love will prevail.

Amen.