

August 27, 2017

Turning Point

PRAYER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON

Little did I know that the vestry was going to make the kind gesture that they did and receive an offering in honor of me to support the work, that is very dear to my heart. Because the church that I served in Melbourne built a hospital in Ca Canada and 31 years ago when I was in India visiting that hospital while it was under construction. Our group had the opportunity to go around the country and while we were in Calcutta we had the incredible opportunity to visit Mother Teresa's home for the dying.

It was really something as we got there, it surprisingly if you go out the back door you enter into a Hindu temple. But anyway, going into that humble clinic which was very sparse but also immaculately clean. It made an indelible impression on me. As I saw the sisters caring for the sick and dying. It made an impression upon me as to the power of faith to shape the way we live.

Calcutta, throughout its history, has been the destination of refugees. People fleeing political unrest and natural disasters. They just inundate Calcutta, bringing with them only their need. A hundred thousand people live in the streets. Over twenty-five thousand live in the railway station. It's an incredible sight and experience. And as you walk the streets of Calcutta the smell of death is literally in the air. The reason the smell of death is in the air is because of all the people and animals living in the streets and dying there. People living in the streets because they have no place else to go and dying there because there is no one to care for them when they get sick.

Mother Teresa began her work with her missionaries of charity going through the streets of Calcutta picking up these forgotten people and bringing them back to their humble clinic. Nursing the ones that they could back to health and comforting those they could not, those who were dying with the love of Jesus.

As I was there the spirit of joy radiating from the faces of the missionaries of charity was simply overwhelming as we watched them caring for these desperate people. And made me realize that even though they have nothing of worldly value, because of the treasure of the kingdom they possess in their hearts. They are probably wealthier than you or I ever will be.

Now in today's gospel we hear Jesus asking his disciples this question, "Who do you say that I am?" And reflecting on his question through the lives of the missionaries of charity we quickly see that the essence of the Christian faith is a life of love for Jesus giving itself in service to

others. Today we hear Jesus asking that question. And we realize that the question is not only directed at his disciples, it's directed at you and me. "Who do you say that I am?"

As we look at that question we see that the missionaries of charity are just wonderful examples of faith acted in love. And as we look at their lives, their work among the sick and the dying, it's easy for us to say that they pass the test with flying colors. Through their acts of compassion and love. They make a profound confession of faith of Jesus as their Lord and their Savior.

But as that question is directed at us, what about us? We have to ask ourselves what about us? Do our lives pass the test? You know their lives they pass the test but more personally, what about us? Do our lives pass the test? Do our hearts show a fullness of a love of Jesus? Do our hands evidence works of compassion and mercy doing Jesus' work in the world? What about us? Do our lives exemplify and make this profound confession of faith?

There's a wonderful story in the 19th chapter of the book of Acts. Paul is in Ephesus. He is doing incredible miracles exhibiting great power doing things in the name of Jesus. And he's having great success but his success is coming at a price. Because there are other miracle workers in Ephesus who are becoming very unhappy with Paul and the things he's doing because they are in the business for personal gain. And Paul is doing it out of the love of Jesus, just giving this gracious love of God away. Just bringing healing and wholeness to people's lives. They are not happy with Paul and they really wish he would leave town.

But then there were the seven sons of Sceva. They saw what Paul was doing and they thought that man why don't we try doing that. They thought they could copy Paul and cash in on a good thing. So, they approached a man who was possessed by a demon. And they commanded the demon to come out of the man in the name of Jesus that Paul preaches. Well the demon responded to the sons of Sceva and they said Jesus we know, Paul we know, but who are you? They tried to fight evil in the name of Jesus without any relationship with Jesus. And the results were disastrous. After they commanded the evil spirit to come out and he asked them who are you, the man jumped on them and attacked them. And beat them senseless.

And there's a wonderful teaching moment in that story. Something that we need to heed and understand. And it's simply this, second-hand Christianity has no power. Think about that for a moment. Second-hand Christianity has no power. The power of faith is found in our relationship with Jesus. And so, the issue is not what our parents think about Jesus, or what our spouses think about Jesus, or what our friends think about Jesus. That's not the issue. The issue is what do YOU think about Jesus? What do you and I think about Jesus? What do we believe about him? Do we have Jesus' love in our hearts? Are our hands at work doing his work in the world? Sharing his love and compassion? That's what Jesus' wants to know.

You know when Jesus asks this question, "Who do you say I am?" The answer to that question is not really found on our lips, it's found in our hearts. Hearts filled with his love. That expresses itself with our hands in acts of compassion and mercy. Reaching out to others in this love.

Today Jesus asks you and me that question. Who do you say I am? And that question is the very turning point of our lives. What do we believe about Jesus as he looks for the answer to that question. As he looks into our lives. Let us pray that he finds it in hearts filled with love for him. Filled with a passion for him. And in hands doing his work in the world. Jesus asks and he awaits our answer to his question. Who do you say that I am?

PRAYER

May that peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.