

February 18, 2018

## **What Can We Do?**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### SERMON

The season of Lent is a season of confession, of repentance, and forgiveness. And so, I guess in this first Sunday in Lent, I should begin with a confession. My confession is that over the last three or four days I've worked not on one sermon but two. And it wasn't until this morning that I decided which one to give.

The first sermon, the one that I'm not giving, would be very easy for me to give. It would be about Jesus being pushed into the wilderness. It would be about temptation. It would be about how we share that with Jesus. And how we are tempted. And how sometimes we fail to be obedient to God and give in to those temptations. And yet there is redemption, forgiveness, and salvation. That's the first sermon. That would be easy to expand on.

The second sermon comes out of what's been going on in the world, in the lives around us over the last few days. And as much I didn't really want to give this sermon it was the one that kept coming to mind and kept coming to heart. It was interesting that Tuesday started a conversation with Maria. She asked me about the possibility of opening space at the church and time at the church to allow kids who need someone to talk to, to have a place to do that. To have a person that is qualified and is willing to speak with kids who are struggling, who are lost, who are frustrated, who are dealing with things beyond their

ability to deal with them. And to have that here at St. Jude's because of our proximity to the schools. And this also came out of a conversation that another student had died because of an overdose of drugs.

That's always hard to hear. It becomes too commonplace. There have been so many young people in this community and across our country who in their endeavor mask pain, they turn towards drugs. And too often either intentionally or accidentally, they take drugs that shut down their system in a temporary problem results in a permanent solution of death. And the question was can we provide space and time so that perhaps we can have children come who are dealing with issues that would be able to deal with them constructively. They would be able to learn how to live through those so that they could continue to live their lives. Lives that might truly contribute things in the future are not lost now. That was the first conversation.

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday was going well, I had completed two services in position of ashes, Eucharist, a good beginning to Lent. Until in the afternoon the story started coming across, that a young man had taken a weapon to school and by the time he was finished he had killed 17 children and wounded 15 more.

That was when I started struggling with what I was going to preach on this morning. Too many times over and over again we have found ourselves hearing stories just like this. Not just in schools but across our country. And as I get on Facebook, because I know people and I have connected with people who I knew when I was in school and such. But you also see an awful lot of posts when something like this happens. Everybody wants to have their say in what they think happened to cause this. Or what is going on. Or what should be done. And I promise you this is not a sermon about gun control.

This is a sermon about the lostness of people. This is a sermon about how we have become a place where we see these stories and they become a part of us. And we hurt, we pray for a moment in time and then we go right back to being who we were.

I don't usually respond to social media when it comes to these kinds of things until I get overwhelmed with what's going on. And I made the mistake of responding to one and then a whole conversation got started. About the questions, about what's the cause, what's to blame, very little about what we should do. According to some, it sounds like we ought to turn back the clock 50 years or so because things were so much better then. For some, it's about gun control.

But it's not just that. It's about the people lives and how they are broken. It needs to be a conversation about having the right medications for people who have mental illness, so that they can live their lives without harming themselves or without harming others. It's about having a discussion about the anger and the pain that is in our country. Our inability it seems for even our leaders to speak to one another kindly and graciously.

It's about having the mental health treatments that are necessary for people to deal with the anger, with the anguish. We can't seem to agree on, you know, can we afford this? But can we afford not to have it? We have people who are trying to live their lives in a very confusing world. Who are already confused about who they are and what they are called to be and what they should be doing in their lives.

We have young children who are being bullied at school who see no alternative other than to commit suicide. We all these issues that we need to be dealing with and not trying to lay the blame here or here or here. (Ringing in audience) Time for me to stop. (Laughter)

This is one small voice and one (still ringing) Okay answer the phone. (Laughter) You will be amazed at how quickly I get back on track. This is one small voice (another phone rings...Laughter). Maybe I got it wrong, maybe I should be doing the other sermon. (Laughter) One more time I'm going to try this line. (Laughter) This is one small voice in one small church. In one small denomination, in one small town. And I do not expect it to have ramifications across our country.

But we as the church have to make a response. We as a church have to lift up our leaders in prayer. And I call upon you to make that part of your Lenten discipline. To lift up these issues that are so important in the lives of all our people. To lift up our leaders that God might lead them to have discussions about the needs. About how we can help our people, the broken people. The people who are trying to find their way.

To find means by which we can treat those who need treatment. That we can help those who see opioids and painkillers as the only way to make it through the day. Not simply because of physical pain but because of mental and spiritual pain. It's to lift up the people of our community and our country in prayer that they might have the people come to them who can help them understand who they are. And how they are precious in the sight and heart of God.

We will, here at St. Jude's, to have a space to have a qualified person, to speak to them so that they might be able to find a way to go on, to live life. To find meaning in life, to find hope in life. To find the love of God in life. And I commit my help as a resource to do that as well. Not just to open up space and have that qualified person but to be present as well.

It's about all of us. Lending our prayers and lending our presence to one another. It's about all of us containing the anger that is within us. It's about all of us speaking with kindness to one another. To remember

that the person that we disagree with is a child of God. A brother or a sister. And it is for us to help them or to be helped by them. It's about speaking kindly about the love of God. So that our children know that they are worth so much more than they know. This is a hard sermon. (Crying)

It has to start somewhere. It can start with us. It can start with our prayers. It can start with us being kind to one another here and to spread that beyond these walls. It's about being present. It's about knowing God's love and it's about sharing God's love. May we commit ourselves during the season of Lent, whatever other discipline you have in your life, whatever you've given up, whatever you've taken on. Commit yourself to pray for the peace and love of God to be present in our church, in our community, and in our country. If enough of us commit ourselves to that in prayer and deed. Perhaps we will find a way to make this the nation that God would have it be. A nation of peace, a nation of graciousness, a nation of hope, and a nation that reflects the love of God.