

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost July 2 2023

Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

Any of you remember WWJD? What Would Jesus Do? Back in the 1990's it was the big thing in particularly evangelical circles. To ask that question before you act in any given situation. There were wrist bands, books, curriculum.

While I had some problems with it, I also think it fits well with our particular Lutheran understanding of the Gospel because it says living faithfully as followers of Jesus isn't about knowing a set of rules- I do this in this situation, believe this about that thing- rather it gives us the right questions to ask and points us to, and assumes an understanding of, who Jesus is, how he lived, how he called us to live. And says, just do that in any given situation.

Perhaps the question isn't so much, what would Jesus do, but rather what would Jesus have us do? We know from Maundy Thursday that Jesus' last commandment to us- his followers—is to love one another in the same way Jesus has loved us.

I'm often asked by youth and adults to help them figure out how their faith can be applied to their lives. It's a great question, but in many ways, only they hold the answer.

Because the truth is, in your particular life, I don't know. Not if you are talking about the specific actions to take or not in a given place. What words to say or not, at a particular moment. What I do know, is that God in Jesus has done several things to help us know what to do. How our faith changes how we live.

The first is one that Paul points to in our text from Romans, we have been set free from sin by God in Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism. Not by anything we have done, but by the love of God for us shown through Jesus Christ. So, in Christ we have been set free from the sin that binds us to self-interest, violence, cruelty. Set free from those things that tend to lead to separating us from God and our neighbor.

Second, God in Jesus has given us a purpose and the right questions to ask as we follow him. Our purpose is to be his disciples, to follow him along the way and to live as his ambassadors to the world. He has also told us what we are to do. On that Maundy Thursday we were given a commandment. It was to... Love one another. In the same way Jesus loved us we are to love one another. That's how folks will know we are his followers. You can wear a cross, listen to contemporary Christian music, read the latest faith-based books. All those might be part of your practice of your faith, but how folks will know is how you live. Specifically, how you love people.

So, we know who we are. Freed from sin by Jesus. Set apart, transformed by that action of God through the waters of baptism

And we know what we are to do in any given situation- love that person there with the same love that God in Jesus has shown us.

It's that simple and that hard, and that is why we need community. To help us discern the answer. What does it mean to love my neighbor in this moment? What does it mean to love my neighbor when that guy over there just called that girl a bad name? Is it to go and comfort the girl? To confront the guy?

Sometimes, following Jesus and loving my neighbor is as simple as offering someone a cold drink of water on a hot day, just because they look thirsty. Or being polite to a harassed fast-food worker, even when they are being a bit short with you. Showing grace. Love. Being a follower of Jesus is just that simple. And, it is just that hard.

I wonder if we want the rules, the specifics, the cut and dried, because then we don't have to think. We don't have to engage. We don't have to really change. I wonder if that is what Paul was trying to get at with his whole ministry. Freeing us from the law. Because it is easier to follow directions than to discern the way to go. Because then what saves us is the directions, the law, not Jesus.

But in Christ, we died to all of that. Through the waters of baptism we have been freed from that. Free to live bound only to God in Jesus, to the freedom of love. I'm bound to the freedom of love. Now there's a song or book title.

But we forget that, sometimes. Don't we. We slip back into old habits. We get caught up in the law of this world. To be successful you have to do x,y,z. We make other things more important than God. We fear love and trust a political leader or party. Money. Fame. Appearing successful on our SnapChat or TikTok posts. Or maybe it's not that we make other things more important than God, but we think that God is only part of our lives, not shaping our whole life.

And that is where we need a reminder, like Paul gives. In essence he is saying, if you got traded to the other team, why are you still playing here? Why are you showing up at that old job you quit? You have been freed from all of that! We are orange trees, so produce oranges- says Paul- not snickers bars. Why? Because that is what you are.

That's what we hear over and over again in our corporate life together. You have been set aside, freed from sin. So, live as what you are! People of love and grace. People claimed by God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the waters of baptism. Given the power through that same Spirit and by Jesus to go into the world and free others. To name and cast out the demons in their lives. So go be that. Live that. Be what you are. It's just that easy.

And, it is just that hard. So, God in Jesus has also given us help. These siblings in Christ that surround you. A diverse and imperfect bunch, to be sure, but a group committed to discerning what it means to love as Jesus loved in any given situation. To loving you, in all your giftedness and imperfection. To gather together around the Word of God, the Waters of

baptism, the Meal of Christ's own body and blood. To sing, and pray, and ponder, and practice. So that we might be strengthened each week to go into the world and love as Jesus loved.

We've got about 20 more weeks to go before Advent, but I think this is the key to what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus. This is the answer to how does this apply to my everyday life. Be what you are, set apart by God in Jesus, a holy people. Live with this question always in your heart, what does it mean in this place and with these people to love them as God in Jesus Christ has loved me?

Do that and all will be well.

And if that frightens or intimidates you at all. That's okay, because that's what God is for. That's what we as the community of faith are for. To support, encourage, admonish, and most importantly to welcome and love you without reserve.

To gather week after week around Word, Table, Font and practice figuring out what it means to love as Jesus loved in all kinds of situations and with all kinds of people. And that is what life fuller and more abundant looks like.

This font, this table, this Word is open to all. So won't you come and join us on the journey.