

Pastor Barnes - *Living Through the Not So Clear Times!*

June 28, 2020 - 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Jeremiah 28 and Romans 5

Before I brush the rust off from not sermonizing....!

I wanted to share thanks to Tim and Leslie, for all their work not just these past two weeks, but all during this time of “unsettling times,” and yes, I’m sure frustrations. All three of us have wanted to do our best to keep Our Savior Lutheran Church and beyond connected and feeling the faith we share. Tim and Leslie need to be thanked, even though I’m sure they do this from their hearts.

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Oh, and by the way....there were only 9 cases in Vilas county total and we were way away from just about everyone! AND fishing was good as well!

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Okay, now: Have you ever been so dogged tired, that one more thing felt like it might push you beyond the limits of tiredness and frustration? Have you ever felt that anxiety made you just so jittery, that someone innocently tapping you on the shoulder would make you jump and yell? You, me, the community, country and the world, seem to be about a “tick” before that. People are creating their own ideas of what is right, what is needed and what they can and should not do. Billboards, placards, twitter and face-book continue to erupt like a volcano that is just ready to spew forth great disaster. Protests and violence are gaining a foothold in hearts and minds of the people. Rightly so and I pray move us into a better peace from whence we came and should go.

It’s that one more thing...isn’t it. It’s taking up space in our hearts and minds that feels chaotic.

I want to tell you that I was a great child! Yes, yes, I know hard to believe. Never got very sick and when I did, never cried the night. Always listened to my parents the first time and did what they asked even when I was not fully understanding. Always willing to share with my brothers and make sure that they were included. In school, when I didn’t get picked till last for a team during intramurals...that was perfectly okay and I understood. Never said something derogatory about any other person! Whether about looks, talents, race, gender or personality. Got along with everyone! Never had to be told.....”grow up.”

Of course you know these things are not true! In fact, I’m sure that I am still trying to mature and grow up....

Too often I allow my opinions to override my ability (if I have that) to seek others needs and burdens.

COVID 19 is a time of unhappiness because it squishes our self- wants and our self- ideas saying: we are more than a virus!

Maybe so, but then scriptures share that we are supposed to carry one another’s burdens and operate from God’s love...living in these not so clear times, might make us unhappy - but we are meant for more.

Susie Orbach, a therapist reflected on what it means to be human during the pandemic: “We cannot escape unhappiness. It is constitutive of being human, just as are creativity, courage, ambition, attachment and love. Let’s embrace the complexity of what it means to be human in

this time of sorrow as we think and feel our way to come out of this, wiser, humbler and more connected.” Wiser, humbler and more connected, she said. This speaks not only to the pandemic, but “getting along with one another,” beyond how we are different.

As we talk about community in common as children of God. As we talk about caring beyond ourselves with COVID 19, wearing masks OR waving them in anarchy?

There is a passage in Romans, as God’s children in Christ that makes more sense now.

Romans 5:1-8 ¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Do we live at peace with God through our Lord Jesus...peace amid the chaos of the pandemic? Peace amid the need for seeing beyond differences to the delight that God created us all.

Pastor Isaac Villegas of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (I have to ignore Tar Heels for Duke!) spoke of becoming the Church: “...*the spring-breakers live in a different world from the young people at my church. Yesterday, in our junior high Sunday school class via Zoom, one of them talked about her social responsibility to stay at home for the sake of the elders, for their safety. This is how we love our neighbors, she said.*”

Herbert McCabe interprets the fourth commandment (honor your father and mother) as developing the implications of the first (no graven images). To honor the older generation is a commitment against idolatry. “This is not a commandment for children...It has to do with the old.” McCabe writes in *Law, Love, and Language*: “To respect people just because they are images of the God of freedom even though they are not longer any ‘use’ is test of the worship of (God) alone.”

I would like to add...age is not the denominator, rather it’s the math a person uses to exclude others in favor of themselves. Math that misses the point of caring for the sick, OR the delicate balance of honoring others who might become sick. Math that misses the milieu of minorities who seem lesser because of inequalities that just don’t add up.

Just the other day...I am delighted to be found in misunderstanding! Happy that what was seen on the news as a “noose” for Bubba Wallace (minority NASCAR driver) Turned into a non-connected incident and a vision of visual hope and compassion shared by all the drivers, pit crews walking together down the track pushing #43 to the front to the starting position. Colorful in all their racing outfits, but curing of hearts!

The basic question: “How should we be getting along?” In pandemics or people prejudices or any other arena?

Isaiah 58:6-9

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator^[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard! This is the reality of living, often times, with no clear way out...other than making sure the Lord is your rear guard. Sometimes we don't want to grow up or, think we know all that is necessary! Sometimes we want to BE recognized as having the answer, maybe, just maybe usurping God's part in our lives?

That is why I read all of chapter 28 in Jeremiah. The "yokes" we wear that we don't want to wear. Hananiah offers the people what they want to hear! Thus says the Lord of hosts. By the way, being a false prophet, one would expect a charlatan or quack, an idolater or something obviously deceptive.

Hananiah's name means: "Yahweh is gracious." He uses all the right words: "Thus says the Lord" He offers a better/easier future and way out. Two years...the yoke will be broken. Your worship items and you can go home.

This said, in the presence of Jeremiah, the priests, the elders and the people, Hananiah speaks his sense of what God SHOULD say if he and the people want to be happy. Hananiah wanted to be recognized as important and words the people wanted to hear.

Jeremiah for his part says: "Amen! Kudos! Hope it happens! Doesn't seem to be the way we are headed, but hey, if you/God say so. I mean you are a true prophet right?"

The only test will it be true? And the path that God has them walking is it clear and easy? I mean many a hearer/reader would be led to think that Hananiah is even more believable than Jeremiah himself.

This is what we WANT to hear! I couldn't believe that this text, this chapter in Jeremiah came up during our time of walking a path that is full of pitfalls and problems. You don't think that God's Spirit is paying attention?

Yes, we would like the straight path. Yes, we would like the issues to be minor. Yes, frustration and waiting and wondering and getting mixed messages is happening.

Like Hananiah there are many who say....no big deal! It will be gone and things will be back to better than normal. Like Hananiah speaking: we can go back to the way things were....no changes needed in our relationships to people OR God, can't we?

Marches and protests are not a part of people and peace are they? If we search for the Word that God speaks, if we move ahead into Chapter 29 of Jeremiah. The Prophet says: Get along with each other, even when we are all different in many ways....

When you truly make peace with people. When you truly make peace with the needs, potential illness and caring for others THEN verse 11-13 of Chapter 29 happens: For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."

Can we "grow up" together? Can we understand that Love is bearing burdens and "love is patient and kind?"

Can we carry one another even in our differences and different opinions so that hope shines through?

IT took 70 years for the path from the Babylonian exile to happen. Rather than seeing THIS time as only pain, why not seek the promise and opportunity that God continues to be "our rear guard," if we continue to pray and listen.

Jesus understands. (Matt. 10:42) - "and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple - truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

A cup of cold water. A helping hand up. A smile (even beneath a mask) of acceptance.

It's a faith in action kind of thing!

Amen.