



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Second Sunday After Pentecost

June 7, 2015

“Jesus and Conformity”

(Mark 3:20-22)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’ And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons’” (Mark 3:20-22).

COLLECT: Almighty and eternal God, Your Son Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons and freed us from bondage to sin. Help us to stand firm against every assault of Satan, and enable us always to do Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

His family thinks Jesus is “out of his mind.” He’s taken leave of his senses. Now he’s not even eating? “Enough is enough!” they think. “This has gone way too far!”

So they’re going to take charge of him. They’re going to seize him. This will be a family intervention. They’ll steal him away and take him back to sleepy Nazareth.

Peter Gomes for a time was the chaplain at Harvard University. He talked of parents who had so carefully, so deliberately reared their children to be brilliant, sending them to the best schools, sending them to chemistry or math camps over the summers. Getting them into Harvard had been the goal and they (the parents) achieved it. Peter Gomes had more than one of these parents come in to express their grave concerns that their child was taking all this religious stuff too seriously . . . doing things like going to chapel and even joining a Bible Study! This is not how they raised their kids. Can you imagine? Kids these days!

Jesus is much farther down that road, and his family have genuine and valid concerns. He is compromising his security, his comfort, his safety, his reputation. His family knows that unless something changes, there’s trouble ahead. So let’s get him back to Nazareth where we can keep an eye on him. There he has shelter at least, and food to eat, a place to rest his head, and people who know and love him. There in Nazareth he has gainful work as a carpenter. Why would he want to throw all that away in the first place? Why would he want to put himself in harm’s way?

Everyone knows he's on a collision course with the religious authorities. It seems as if he's trying to raise their ire. He ignores many of the Sabbath regulations. He presumes to forgive sins which only God can do. He touches the untouchables.

Those religious authorities, those keepers of the status quo, they can do a man a great deal of harm, you know. Those in authority are usually bent on keeping that authority. They'll plow under anyone who gets in the way. Whack a hornets' nest with a stick and you're going to get stung. Already the authorities have flagged him and are starting to build a case against him.

The family is also worried about the company Jesus is keeping. If a man's character is judged by the company he keeps, then Jesus needs to pay more attention to the friends he's choosing. All these sinners and tax collectors with which he's surrounded himself, and the disciples he's chosen . . . is he out of his mind?

The campaigning has already begun for the 2016 presidential race. Of course, each candidate is trying to garnish as much support as they possibly can. And each has a staff of advisors, trying to cultivate a persona that is appealing and winsome, a candidate who's in tune with middle-class priorities. They have people who do damage control when the candidate says or does something unscripted and controversial. They have speech writers. They have pollsters who test how public opinion will respond to this idea or even to a certain phrase. Everything is choreographed, down to the shoes they wear.

Jesus had none of that and would have rejected the same if it had been offered. They would only get in the way because he cared about pleasing God rather than man.

He's not like us in that way. We tend to be very concerned about what our neighbors think of us. It drives a lot of our purchasing decisions, from the car in the garage to the bag of weed killer sitting next to it.

From the shoes we wear to the vacations we take, a lot of it is about the impression we give. We want people to like us . . . or at least respect us. In fact, we tend to be more concerned about their judgments than God's. The verdict of society is more important to us than is the verdict of God.

I think that's one of the things the family of Jesus is reacting to. Jesus doesn't care one little whit about what others think of him. He's immune. People were labeling him as extreme, as heretical, and in our text even diabolical. People were spreading rumors about him. But he doesn't change a thing to accommodate that. He does little to try to protect himself or his reputation. He makes no compromises, no concessions, and as such he stands out, his family thinks in an unhealthy way. And indeed, there's some truth to that, isn't there? His defiance of social norms is part of what got him crucified.

And I have no doubt, I have no doubt that if Jesus himself were to start preaching and teaching in North America today, he would get the same response. Can you imagine the howls of objection coming out of our universities, the whimpering of this group or that to which he showed insensitivity? As his reputation grew and his sermons were put on YouTube, can imagine the outrage emanating from various West Coast celebrities? Can you imagine the plans being made on the East Coast to censure him? I suspect many of the seminaries in the land would also be holding theological symposiums to examine and discredit his theology. And in the end, I suspect we too would find a way to arrest him (probably for hate crimes), and ultimately silence him.

We are called to be his disciples, and if we do it right, we're going to stand out too. Life can be difficult for the one who seeks to obey God rather than man. But Paul wrote, "I appeal to you brothers, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern

what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Remember what the Lord told his people as he brought them up out of Egypt? Leviticus 18, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes” (Lev. 18:3).

They’ve passed through the waters, (the Red Sea), and are God’s people now, belonging to him and not to the world. We’ve passed through the waters, and are God’s people now, belonging to him and not to the world. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you . . . but I chose you out of the world.” (John 15:18). And here’s a strong warning from James: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jms 4:4).

As disciples of Jesus we are called to hold on to the truth of God’s Word even when the culture is outraged by that truth. We are called to be a light in the darkness, not to acquiesce to the darkness and blend in. Richard Foster said, “To conform to a sick society is to become sick.”

You are disciples of Jesus. Don’t let the culture you live in dilute the integrity of your confession. If you let it, the tyranny of public opinion will rule over you. It will become your god. It will determine your every move. Be the child of God he has called you to be in Holy Baptism.

A couple of years ago Dr. Paavola said something in Bible Study that really struck me. Just three words: “Plagiarism is suicide.” “Plagiarism is suicide.” It was a passing remark; he didn’t expand on it, but I think the point is clear. Copying someone else’s work rather than producing your own is denying the skills and thoughts and experiences and training and perceptions you have. It’s killing off the life God has given you and denying

the person God has made you to be.

Similarly, plagiarizing the culture, folding into the culture, is suicide. It is smothering the child of God that he has created you to be.

I don't remember where I read it, but an Iranian Christian was teaching his grandson that like a fish you always want to swim against the current, because if you're just floating with the current, chances are you're dead.

1 John 4 says, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, (that is, every prevailing attitude) but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Finally, the Good News is that Christ refused to be patronized by his family or anyone else. He refused to compromise his message or mission. He did not go back to Nazareth to live out a quiet and inconsequential life. No, he carried on, faithfully proclaiming the kingdom of God. He endured the tests, the traps, their mockery. Even as the opposition against him rose, he did not shrink back. In fact, that was when he walked straight into Jerusalem, the capital of his country, the center of political and religious authority, where he tossed tables and drove out the money changers and made many new enemies in high places. For us who want always to be warmly welcomed, he was fearfully deserted. For us who want to be held in high esteem he was arrested as a common criminal. For us who want to be praised he was condemned. For us who want desperately to fit in, he was expelled fit only for crucifixion. For us who want to live quietly and comfortably, he was violently executed.

And all this he did willingly, because he loved us. ". . . who for the joy endured the cross" Paul wrote. There's nothing joyful about a cross unless it's for those you love, to save them from something even worse.

Friends, we are not saved by the integrity of our discipleship. We are saved by the integrity of his life, and his death for us. We are saved by his blood that

washes us clean of every fault and failure. We are saved by his love from which nothing can separate us.

The mores of the culture, they have and will keep changing, dramatically. But God's commands, and even more so his love, they have not changed. They remain the same, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

