

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
March 7, 2021

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is information about how to set up an appointment for a COVID vaccine using the phone.

Tower Health 484-659-3000  
Office of the Aged 610-478-6500

In the event of the opening of the Muhlenberg School for in-person learning, we will be opening our Kids Korner before and after school program. If you or anyone you know is interested in a part-time job (split shift), please contact Becky Watson at 610-926-4201 ext. 207.

If you have prayer request, please send them to me so that I can include them in my weekly newsletters.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Denise  
Home Phone 610-750-6432 Cell/Text Phone 610-858-8187

## 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

A reading from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of I Corinthians beginning at the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse.

<sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

<sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ

## John 2:13-22

A reading from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of John beginning at the 13<sup>th</sup> verse.

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

<sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

<sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

<sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”

<sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

## Sermon for March 7, 2021

Rev. Grant Wickert

I Corinthians 1: 22-25; John 2: 13-22

Jay was shocked, totally devastated when the doctor walked into his hospital room and said, “Jay, if you want to go on living, you have to make some dramatic changes in your lifestyle.” Jay had been a traveling salesman his whole career. His route covered hundreds of miles. Putting 100,000 miles a year on his car was nothing out of the ordinary for him. This was the only life he knew for over 25 years. He could not imagine doing anything else at this point in his life.

The doctor saw it differently. Jay’s routine, day after day, had taken a tremendous toll on Jay’s health. He had real problems with high blood pressure. His eyesight was suffering from years of strain that came from

trying to drive just a few more miles each day to make one more call before stopping. What landed Jay in the hospital was a blackout while driving, resulting in his car going into a tree and Jay have minor injuries from the crash. As long as Jay continued in this routine, no medicine in the world would help him and nothing could prevent a worse accident in which he, and perhaps other innocent people, would be severely injured or even killed.

So the doctor issued an ultimatum: “Either change your life, or I will see to it that your driver’s license is taken away.”

When Jay heard those words, he was at first very angry. “How dare that doctor even suggest

that I should change?” “I’ll show him! Nobody’s going to tell me how to live my life!” When he calmed down and talked the whole matter over with his wife and family, he realized that the doctor was right. The family pledged their support in helping him make the changes he needed to make. They reminded him that he knew a great many people and, by networking, there was a good chance he could find another job. Within one week, he did just that! He got a job selling new and used cars. He proved to be quite good at it! No more 400 mile days! No more eye strain from too long behind the wheel! Many people had been telling Jay for years now that he should make these changes. But it took the shock of a blackout and the accident and the doctor’s threat to move Jay to change. Once he did, he found himself living a richer, fuller life, a life he would never have found of his own free will, even though his life depended on it.

I think of this story every time I wrestle with today’s gospel lesson describing how Jesus drove the money changers and those buying and selling merchandise out of the Temple. The similarity between the two stories for me lies in the dynamics of what it takes to make major changes. Jay would never have made any changes in his life if it were up to him alone. And Jesus’ dialogue with the religious leaders of his day about changing their ways had also fallen on deaf ears. They were stubbornly committed to the traditions they had known. They wanted no part in looking at new options. So, when the time was right, Jesus had no choice but to take the situation into his own hands and show them he meant business.

I can recall how, as a child, I wrestled with what this passage is all about. I used to ask why those merchants were in the Temple in the first place. And then I asked why this tale would

be in the Bible at all. And why did Jesus cause such chaos? Now I know that this dramatic scene is the only way Jesus could show those religious leaders that they had to change. Otherwise they would not listen to him. It was time for them to forsake this time-honored tradition of selling animals for sacrifice and focus on changing the hearts of people instead. “A broken and a contrite spirit thou wilt not despise,” Jesus recalled from the scripture of his day.

Jesus had told them about a God of love, about a God who wanted changed hearts rather than the smoke of animal sacrifice as a sign of the people’s devotion to him. Jesus held out before people a whole new way of relating to God, a whole new way of life, but they were just not listening.

That’s the part of the story I never got as a child. We were left thinking that the Temple

had become some sort of farmer’s market, and certainly no house of God should become that. These money changers and merchants were a link to the past from which Jesus wanted to set the people free. For as long as the people were rooted in such superstitious practices from the past, they would never be able to relate to the new life Jesus came to bring. They would never understand that God’s love negated their efforts at trying to appease God with sacrifice and good works. This was a radical concept for them to grasp! A radical concept that required a radical proclamation! The time had come to create chaos in the place where the buying and selling of God’s forgiveness was taking place! It was a new day! In Jesus, there was a whole new way to think about God and about life!

Jesus announced to the whole world that a new order had come and that he himself was in the process of serving as the

ultimate sacrifice to end all sacrifices. He proclaimed that, in the future, love would take the place of ritual as the key to a living relationship with Almighty God and with one another.

Admittedly, Jay became comfortable with his new way of life only after a period of adjustment, but had he continued with his old ways, he may never have had the chance to experience any kind of future at all. Two thousand years after Jesus walked this earth, you and I are still in the process of trying to adjust to the new lifestyle introduced by our Lord that day in the Temple. That's because most of us have a very long way to go before we are prepared to simply trust that God's love is broad enough to embrace our pitfalls and shortcomings. We still believe that there is something we have to DO to merit the grace of God.

That is precisely the point where today's reading from I Corinthians comes into play. Paul writes of the real power there is for us in the cross of Jesus Christ. In this apparent symbol of human weakness, we find the power and wisdom of God for our lives. Every other pathway, every other form of wisdom, every other loyalty the world seeks to have us follow is just so much seduction.

Years ago I read a story I have never forgotten about two young men who got into trouble with the law for carousing and vandalism they had been involved in on a night when they were "feeling no pain." One of these young men was from quite a wealthy family, who bailed him out of jail almost immediately. The other young man was from a family whose father had recently died and there was a real struggle going on just to make ends meet. The mother of this second young man could not bail her son out of jail. As a matter

of fact, she took a second job in a local stone quarry to begin to pay for her son's legal expenses. She visited her son every chance she got. He always remembered how cut up, scarred and terrible-looking her hands were from working in that quarry.

A couple of years passed. Both these young men served their time and got out of jail. They happened to meet again on a downtown street one day. The rich one said to the other, "Let's get together tonight and have a good time, just for the fun of it."

"I cannot do that," replied the other.

"Why not?" said the rich one.

"Because I have seen the scars and bruises on my mother's hands. I know what she did for me—the sacrifice she went through. Seeing her hands has changed my whole way of

thinking...my whole way of living."

That story invites you and me to do some soul-searching. For each of us still has difficulty letting go, trusting in the promise of God's grace to redeem life. We remain convinced that there just must be something we can and should DO to cover our bases. We have yet to hear clearly the proclamation of Jesus that day in the Temple. We are still more committed to the validity of sacrifices we make than we are to the power of the cross.

We have similar problems believing that God is ready to accept our offerings as acts of faith and gratitude. They are not putting a down payment on eternal life. God has made the first and foremost offering when Jesus died for us on the cross. It is in THAT offering that there is power for us. Power that comes to us as we know God accepts us

and loves us unconditionally as we are. Power that comes to us in the potential of a totally new, totally changed, totally enriched life.

Jay's life became richer and fuller because of the dramatic change which took place as a result of the words of a doctor in a hospital. Our lives have the potential of becoming richer and fuller if we can simply learn to see the power in the cross, in the

redeeming grace which God has revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ. Once we learn to trust, the offering of our lives in his service becomes a genuine expression of our thanksgiving and we become part of a whole new power God is unleashing on the world. Become more aware day by day of the power of the cross in your life. The world may call it foolishness. But we know better, don't we? Amen.

***Blessing***

May

The love of God,

The light of Christ,

And the joy of the Holy Spirit

Abide with you on this day

and forever more.

**AMEN**