

Sunday, June 6, 2021
Pastor Norman Fowler
"Whoever does the will of God"

You know when there is someone we don't want to hear because they are saying something that cuts a little too close to home. Some people have said the best sermon is the one that goes over my head and hits the person behind me. There are times when there something is going on that we don't want to hear; we don't want to see. And there are some ways that I think human nature tries to deal with some of those, so we don't hear what we don't want to hear. One of the things that we get from this particular text is that Paul did not want to hear what Jesus was saying, or recognize what he was doing. After all, why was this laborer, carpenter, builder; all of a sudden acting as a Rabbi? Why is he saying things like love your neighbor? And how is he doing this healing stuff? He must be out of his mind. That is a good excuse to not have to listen to this fellow. And if that's not enough, we can say that he has really gone over to the other side. He's not one of us.

You know, whoever is not for us is against us, and so the scribes come and say that about Jesus. Jesus has gone over to the other side; he is in cahoots with the ruler of the demons. He's in cahoots with all that afflicts us. So don't listen to him. Even if what he says sounds like its good, even if things that he wants to tell us about are helpful, even though he wants to heal people; he only does what is good because he is in cahoots with what is evil.

I have never quite understood that argument, but its not an argument we haven't heard, and continue to hear. We get contradictory advise today. We see many good intentions, words, and ideas being told that they come from evil. Things like justice, social justice, and equity. We are not to pay attention to those ideas because they come from people who are out of their minds. They are not one of "us". Therefore, they must be against us.

Jesus cuts to the heart of our own problem, as well as his, when he says a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. A house divided against itself, cannot stand. Claiming evil is behind something good does not make the good evil. In fact, if good is done it is in some ways overcoming evil. That is his point about binding the strong man. He uses the image of binding the strong man, so that the good can be accomplished. The strong man is the force of evil. Jesus is inviting us, in the midst of these folks who are coming to say, you're out of your mind, you're telling us things we don't want to hear. And to keep on saying things they don't want to hear.

He goes on to talk about the blasphemy of the holy spirit. It was interesting to me, when I looked up the word blasphemy in Greek, it literally means, slow to call something good that really is good. I found that an incredibly interesting definition. There are a couple things I want to note, part of the problem we have is about what defines the good. Where do we find that good? It depends on who we listen too. For myself when I want to try to understand what is good , I don't start by listening to the news, I don't start by listening to anybody's writings; except for scripture. For me I've got to start there , not some pendant or professor. Scripture. We can get some insights from

other voices but if we don't have the solid voice of scripture, we can also be taken astray. It's not like it is that hard to understand the basic idea of goodness in scripture.

I have been going back to the basic fruits of the spirit over the last couple weeks, I tend to go there a lot. I really think that is one of the places we see the kind of the goodness that God wants. But there are other places. This last week, we were reading together in Bible project, the book of Amos, and we have been looking at the prophets, it is pretty clear that what God wants is to have a relationship with His people that works. And for people to have a relationship with each other that works. Justice, Social justice, equity, and caring for one another, there is a part in the Ten Commandments that tells us this.

It is not hard to see that the arc of scripture suggests God's love for us in this life, and what that means for the good of mankind. Sometimes, however; we resist that good, because it does mean that we have to change some things about the way we live, or the way society works. And so, resisting the call of the Holy Spirit, resisting calling the Holy Spirit good, and resisting the way God speaks through Jesus, where God continues to speak in the world through the Holy Spirit, has consequences. The inability to know forgiveness, is to end up separated from God and the family of God. So here we have this sense of Jesus being told that he is out of step; that he's out of his mind, and he must be in cahoots with the devil because he's not fitting into the way the Scribes want things to look, or the traditions that people think they know, that goodness that is defined by the few.

In the middle of that, we hear that his family is coming to change his mind. To re-contain him. Perhaps, so that people won't think he is out of his mind. It is interesting because in his time, the extended family, according to my research, was a source of one's status in the community, it also functions as the economic, religious, educational, and social network. The family was the basic unit of almost everything that happened, and the way things worked. Now this could be good fortune, if you were born into a family that was doing well, which there weren't tons of in Jesus' time. But if not, then you really weren't that fortunate. Your family could define the kind of work you do, what you were to think, and what you were to pay attention to. So Jesus is in this time where family is pretty much everything; your economic system, your religious system, and your political system. It was a power and status system, as well. Jesus says, no, to being re-contained by his family. Instead, he looks around at the people who have gathered with him, who are listening and opening themselves to the word that God is bringing amongst them, and he says, "Anyone whosoever does the Will of God, is my brother, and my sister, and my family."

The scribes who came down, I think, were saying that anyone who is not for us is against us. Jesus seems to change that around a little bit. In another place in scripture, he says, whoever is not against us, is for us. Jesus is inviting all of us, whoever might want to do the Will of God and whoever gets involved in doing the Will of God, to recognize that we are now apart of a new family, a different kind of family, that we are the children of God. When he does this, and he looks around at the people who are there he says these are my brothers, and sisters, and mother. Whosoever does the will of God is overcoming the normal categories of birth, class, race, gender, education, wealth, status, power, and whatever else we use to divide us. He is inviting us to all be apart of the same family, the family of God.

This would have sounded crazy to the scribes. I think, it is as Paul begins to live this out, he recognizes that the world that he is in, is not accepting that message right off the bat. He sees in fact that world is struggling and trying to come to terms with its way of doing things in much different ways. And so, as Paul looks at the Roman world he says even though our outer nature is wasting away, what encourages us to recognize, that even as we struggle to see how goodness might be overcoming evil in the world, that our inner nature is becoming renewed day by day.

It is fascinating to me that it is that inner nature being renewed, as it gathered in groups, and again, to be communities of restoration and forgiveness, the world changed. So as we live in a world that has a way of denying, disengaging, and disappearing challenges and challengers of what is wrong with the world, in some ways I feel like Jesus has been one of those challengers that continues to urge us to love our neighbors and ourselves. He also challenges us to love those we consider our enemies, and challenges us to give priority to God, in a world that gives little priority to God. Even in that world, as it is divided and uses division to make it hard to see what is good. And sometimes it feels to me that the main purpose of division is to keep us from seeing what is good, and to help us see the possibilities that God would bring us. We see that Jesus challenges the world, the formation of privilege and power; and points to our need and opportunity, to be one people, one family, brothers, and sisters; as we look to do the will of God. Jesus is inviting us to assess what he says, and to affirm it and act in accordance with it, so that we are people that do the Will of God. He's inviting us to overcome all of our differences, and he invites us to be a family wherever we go and whenever anyone enters our doors. I think that is one of the amazing things, that whosoever does the will of God is a brother or sister.

I can go anywhere in the world and find a brother and sister. Yet, we live in a world that keeps finding a way of creating divisions between us, and our brothers and sisters. Jesus instead invites us to come and know we are God's children. It does mean accepting and opening ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, and to recognize the good Jesus preaches and teaches, he shows us the forgiveness and Grace we are given through his death and resurrection. And the hope he sets in front of us, and the table he sets in front of us.

By setting the table for us he is saying; come, be the family of God. accept the work of the Holy Spirit, and the goodness that God would have well up in us, and in our world. Come, recognize that our sustenance is in the grace of God, the teachings of Jesus, and the forgiveness that we know through him. Come to the table. In some ways it is a simple act, a simple way of eating and drinking something. Yet like so much that is Jesus, he invites us to see in and through the lens of something simple, and see the wonder of God's grace and the hope God sets before us, the gifts that God would give us of community, and of being a family, and of life everlasting. So, whether it's the image of the strong man being tied up, or the image of the table, Jesus invites us to know the good, the Grace, and the way of God. And to accept that at times we may hear Jesus as one that seems out of his mind, and out of touch with the particulars of our life. Yet, it feels to me, often times, I am the one that is out of touch. Jesus has a much better understanding of my life, and of our lives, than I do. And he invites us to listen, to hear, and to act according to the will of God. Amen.