

Sermon for Sunday, November 4

Doxology

Well, it's a big day. Today we mark the 75th anniversary of Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church, and celebrate seventy-five years of ministry on behalf of Christ. I am delighted to celebrate the leadership of this service with Don Howland, pastor emeritus, who served this church for nineteen years, and former Associate Pastors Dub Koon, John Carothers, Joe Wilson, and Eldon McKie. Interestingly, this also is the birthday of our founding pastor, the Rev. Dr. David McDowell, who would have been 116 years old today. Gentlemen, I welcome you all home. And a special welcome to all of you who came today to celebrate our congregational milestone, but most especially to Jim Mellow, who at 91 years of age, is our one remaining charter member.

But our joy today is tempered by last Saturday's shooting in Pittsburg, reminding us once again of the death of our Jewish savior, Jesus of Nazareth, of why we celebrate his last supper, and reminding us of our world's need of the church of Jesus Christ, and of our need to continue serving as ambassadors of our Lord's forgiveness, love, and reconciliation. So while we celebrate what we have done as a faithful congregation of God's people, and justifiable so, we also commit ourselves again to keep going, to keep loving, to keep serving, to keep transforming lives with the good news of Jesus Christ because our world cries out for the hope we have to share. And could there have been a more appropriate and providential time to have welcomed the Interfaith Partnership of Greater St. Louis into our cottage? Together with all our brothers and sisters in faith, we will demonstrate to this community that we know how to live in peace.

Whenever I am in this pulpit, however, I am compelled to preach the gospel, and today it comes to us from Mark's Gospel, and it is remarkably appropriate for today.

Jesus is being cross-examined. Priests, scribes, elders, and other assorted defenders of the faith are hovering around him in a frenzy of entrapment. They are after him, looking for a slip of the tongue with which they can accuse him and silence him. Meanwhile, Jesus is frustrated, because despite his answers, he knows they just don't get it. The Word of God is falling on deaf ears.

Then a scribe approaches who has been standing in the back listening carefully to the debate. He seems to like what he hears, but he's not sure. He wants to know where Jesus is coming from, and what his bottom line is. Does he love Torah like the rest of them? Is he one of us? So he asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" knowing full well what the answer should be.

Jesus does not disappoint him, but his answer, characteristically, takes the scribe a step further. He answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' That's all the scribe *wanted* to hear, but Jesus wasn't finished. The scribe *needed* to hear something more. "The second is this," continued Jesus. "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these,'" and with a little grammatical indiscretion Jesus makes two commandments into one.

His point is not lost on the scribe, who with obvious admiration and a transparent degree of wonder, repeats back the answer, not as two commandments, but as one, adding his own editorial gloss by acknowledging that this is much more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices, that is, than losing sleep over all the rituals and minutia of the Law. Clearly excited that someone has finally "gotten it," Jesus, with all the warmth and compassion he can muster, says to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

I'm sure the scribe was pleased with himself as the crowd dispersed and Jesus went on his way, but after awhile, that "not far" comment had to gnaw at him. What did Jesus mean by saying he was "not far" from the kingdom? Why not "welcome" to the kingdom of God? Because, while the scribe had "gotten" a lot of it, he hadn't "gotten" all of it. There is more to the kingdom than just hearing, understanding, repeating, and appreciating God's Word.

The "more" is discipleship: acting on God's Word, responding to it, living it, demonstrating it, and being it. To know that the commandment is to love God and neighbor is one thing, but to do it, to actually love God

and neighbor, is to live it. The essential and all-important declaration of the gospel is that the Word of God became flesh in Jesus Christ. The challenge of the gospel is that in Christ, we too are invited to enflesh God's Word. Anything short of that is short of the kingdom. The Word of God made flesh, when seen and heard, demands response in a demonstrable way.

It is no accident, and no small matter, that in John Calvin's order of worship, which we use in this church, what immediately follows the hearing of God's Word is the offering. It is meant to remind us that the first and most important response to God's Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, who offered himself up for many, is the offering of ourselves, our time, talent, money, faith, and love in service to God. It's one thing to affirm our faith, to assent to the beliefs that give shape and substance to the Christian community, but it is another to take the next step, the step of discipleship, and offer ourselves to the work of the kingdom.

This act of responsive love is a doxology, a joyful, heartfelt, glorifying of God. Glorifying God, from whom all blessings flow, is our very purpose in life, the meaning and reason of our existence. Instead of taking and hoarding, we give and share, like God does. Instead of filling and collecting, we empty and dispense, like God does. Instead of losing our lives by gaining, we gain our lives by losing, and we sing while we do it. We are, in many ways, a strange bunch in this culture. But we are God's bunch.

Doxological living, is not living near the kingdom, but living right in the heart of it. It's a steward's life, managing and dispensing the manifold blessings of God, which flow like a river through our lives. It's responsive love: conserving and recycling the earth's resources, pausing to help a person in need, participating in local and national elections, tutoring a school child, serving on a church committee, hosting at a funeral, tithing to support the mission of the church, speaking up for those who have no voice, praying for global peace, and standing in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters because we love those whom God loves. In response to all that God has given us, we open our hands, our hearts, our minds, our all, to ensure that the Word remains flesh among us, to the glory of God. And we have done that in this church, and will continue to do that in this church, faithfully serving God and Community, and that makes me immensely proud to be your pastor.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

PRAYER: Help us, O God, to glorify you not only with our lips, but also with our lives, loving you and our neighbor with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, as we love ourselves. In Christ we pray, your Word made flesh. Amen.

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75th Anniversary Celebration
Mark 12:28-34