

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

How have you all felt about what you have heard and seen on TV, in the newspapers, and more especially on Facebook, Twitter and the other social media in the last couple of weeks?

Frankly, I have been quite disturbed.

It is all reminiscent of the 20 years of conversation in our own church about human sexuality where the mass of people were caught in between two groups directly opposed to one another creating two voices that claimed absolute righteousness on the issue, and an argument over which no one else could be heard.

We have witnessed in so many ways the groups from each side of the issues about a confederate battle flag since the shootings in Charleston and the Supreme Court ruling on the rights of same gender couples to marry go at each other in some of the most disrespectful ways.

These groups who say they are just being passionate about their cause then demonize everyone who does not agree with them calling them bigots and racists and whatever other names could be called.

In the rhetoric there is no room left for anyone to have a differing opinion from either of the two sides at the extreme edges of the spectrum in the argument.

I read an article about the Episcopal Church's vote at their annual convention last week to allow their priests to officiate at same gender weddings, and in that article the journalist rhetorically asks the question to frame his article,

“Where do the battle lines get drawn now?”

Battle lines? Inside the Church?

This journalist has been reporting of the church for 20 years and frames his article this way?

Battle lines are not an unfamiliar concept to most of us in the church, but is this the question to be asking now?

Inflammatory perspectives like this may help to sell newspapers, but how do they serve to facilitate a conversation about these issues without the destructive rhetoric we are hearing already?

This weekend we celebrate the founding of our nation the foundation of which is in part constructed on the freedom to have an opinion and to be able to communicate that opinion in the public forum.

Unfortunately in our country the reality is that for some there is no room for others to hold a different opinion other than the one they espouse.

Our society is in turmoil like it hasn't experienced since the 1960s, and change is here. Where are we headed?

That is a concern for many at this time.

In May 2015, the Pew Research Center found that support for same-sex marriage among all Americans increased drastically from 39 percent in 2009 to a whopping 57 percent. Opinions on same-sex marriage vary by race, with 59 percent of whites, 56 percent of Hispanics, and just 41 percent of blacks in support.

One of the biggest indicators in whether a group is in favor of same-sex marriage is religion. Of those unaffiliated with religion, 85 percent support marriage equality. In contrast, 70 percent of white evangelical Protestants oppose gay marriage, as do 57 percent of black Protestants.

Along with the great disparity in these numbers is the huge emotional impact these issues have on everyone. These are emotions that are rooted in deeply held, sometimes life long, beliefs, and the kind of belief that says. “This is who I am as a person.”

They are often not subject to change.

So what is my point?

The issue of same gender weddings is a matter we have begun to deal with here as a congregation.

In that conversation we have already learned about the diversity of opinion that exists here among us.

There is a decision to be made about whether there will be same gender weddings held here in this sanctuary.

Our conversation continues in the midst of what goes on outside this gathering of people who are called to love one another.

How will we carry on our discourse?

My prayer and my desire is that in spite of what is going on elsewhere that we are able to continue our conversation with respect for one another, preserving one another’s dignity and equal right to have an opinion, and express an opinion unique to them.

I have searched for voices of calm, steady leadership in the loud clamor for everyone to get on board with this group or that, and they have been difficult to find, but they are there.

I give thanks for our own Presiding Bishop Eaton for her perspective. I had Liz send an email out to the entire congregation this week with

a link to her letter. For those who would like to have a hard copy, I have put a few of them on the end of the table in the library.

There she says in these excerpts of her letter:

For many members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, this decision is a welcome sign of hope and a time for celebration. Other members of this church do not agree with the court's decision and remain deeply concerned because of their understanding of Scripture. This decision affects each of us, some profoundly, and we are not of one mind. Let us continue to accompany one another with prayer, love and mutual respect as we reflect on this new reality and remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians about the enduring power of God's love... As Lutheran Christians, we continue to be a church that engages in conversation and discernment in all aspects of our faith and life. Creating space for respectful conversation and dialogue continues to be an important part of our life together... We seek to see our differences as a gift to be celebrated as we live out that which unites us: the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ who leads us into mission and ministry in the world. In the midst of this change, we are first and foremost church – a church that proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Rt. Rev. Gregory Brewer, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida wrote this in an open letter.

“The demonization of those who support same-sex marriage by those who do not, and the demonization of those who oppose same-sex marriage by those who do must not be present in the Body of Christ. Such antagonism is an affront to the Gospel and a great sin. That is not to say the matter is inconsequential. The divide between these two positions is a serious one and not to be taken lightly. But it is our faith in Jesus Christ as God in the flesh, who died for us and rose

from the dead that unites us, and nothing other than this. Christians must choose to continue to work together across this great divide. It will not be easy, but it is our God-given task. Splitting into tribes of those “for” and “against” within our churches will bear no good fruit, and will only display to the world our lack of faith in Jesus Christ, who prayed that we might be one.

John 17:11b

“Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

These bishops get at the root of my greatest fear for us here at All Saints.

There is a lot at stake in our ability to remain united in our calling to be the church for each one of you in your life and faith, and for our community.

If we cannot remain “one” as the Body of Christ what happens to our ministry? What happens to our 4 year ministry plan?

A division in our church now will result in all that coming apart. Your personnel team continues to seek candidates for our Youth Leader position and in fact just interviewed another candidate with promise last week.

Our worship and music ministry continues to develop. This has become a place and time when people in our community can come to experience God’s presence and love, where they can bring their troubles and cares, and receive God’s grace because you, the Body of Christ welcome them with open hearts regardless of who they are, what they bring with them, what their life situation is.

Our Weekday Childhood Ministry is moving full steam ahead. The week before last we sent six of our children to Luther Springs for a 3 day, 2 night church camp experience. They loved it and are looking forward to going next year.

We are making God's presence in our community visible.

But that doesn't happen just here. You are the presence of the Christ we worship here, and the presence of All Saints, when you are in the community greeting the stranger, and being kind to those around you.

You are the presence of Christ we worship, and All Saints, while you are on Facebook, Twitter and any other social media you may use.

What does Christ and our church look like there in those communities?

When others see you do they see and hear a follower of Christ who was sent out into the world to proclaim the love and grace of the one who sacrificed His very life for you and them?

I encourage you to have these conversations about race and same gender weddings among yourselves. I have said before that your council needs to hear from you.

If you have something you need council to hear speak with one of our council members, and council members, I encourage you to have a listening ear.

Jesus sent his disciples out into a violent world, a world that would reject them the way he had been rejected in his home town.

They were to take nothing with them and had to rely on the hospitality of others to carry out their mission.

This was a trial run for them in preparation for what they would experience after he was gone.

They were instructed to move on if the community would not welcome them, “shake off the dust that was on their feet.”

In this way it seems, they would be able to remain focused on their mission, proclamation of the gospel.

They would go to another place and do it.

Perhaps we can take a lesson from that. Staying focused on our calling to mission will be what moves us ahead and keeps us faithful.

I have said many times that we as All Saints Lutheran Church are much more than our collective stance on same gender weddings.

We cannot allow this one issue alone to define us.

But, perhaps we can show our community and the world that the body of Christ can discuss this issue and all others in respectful ways and create space for every person to be a part regardless of their opinion.

Bishop Brewer was right when he said, “Christians must choose to continue to work together across this great divide. It will not be easy.”

But we know it is faithful.