

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 20 10-6-24 Text: Mark 10: 2-16 "God Loves Families"

One of the perks of working at First Lutheran is that I get to be the first one to read the latest edition of *The Lutheran Witness* magazine as soon as it comes to us in the mail. There are really interesting articles about faith and news about our church body and our own Minnesota South District. Although I have to admit, I do miss the days when *The Lutheran Witness* had a cartoon and a couple of jokes in the back.

At any rate, in this month's issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, Dr. Joel Biermann of CSL writes an article titled "Communities that Confess: How Christian Community Confesses Christ in a Culture of **Isolation**". He starts out with an illustration that I think most of us can relate to. Dr. Biermann writes: "Many of us have fond memories of small-town life: summer festivals, unlocked doors, school pageants, common friends, heartfelt patriotism and a uniform morality. In years gone by, even those living in urban areas typically enjoyed the ordinary delights of life **shared** in tight-knit neighborhoods. Today, however, experiences like these are increasingly relegated to memories and nostalgia. In the 21st century, for a host of reasons, such **communities** are becoming quite uncommon."

Another professor of theology by the name of Dr. Leonard Sweet of Drew University, also shared some words at a conference a few years ago focusing on the widespread individualism that has become so much a part of our modern American culture. In a brief, sincere, **and** humorous way Dr. Sweet summarizes our culture of today: "Here it is all about 'me - me - I - I'. You almost never hear about 'we' and when you do, even that is spelled with two 'i's' in it (Wii)."

Even the ultimate team organization – the U. S. Army – relented a number of years ago when they adopted the recruiting slogan: "An Army of One". Whether it is Wii with the two i's or the tendency to say, "I like do my own thing," or "I like my privacy" there's no question that individualism is a powerful and pervasive value in our culture and because of that closely-connected communities are becoming a thing of the past.

And there is a price to pay for this self-obsession. As people lose the concept of '**we**', the concept of **family also** goes by the wayside along with community. 'We and us' begins to take a back seat to individualism. So, what is the cost for losing community and barreling full speed ahead toward individualism and self-obsession?

Maybe it looks like people spending more time looking at their phones than talking to family and friends, even when they are right there beside them? Perhaps it looks like a husband or a wife thinking or maybe even **saying**, "What

about me and my feelings?" - rather than, "What about what's best for my family?" - as they make a choice to have an affair or abandon their spouse? What is the cost of this 'me - me - I - I' cultural orientation?

It is easy to notice the failings, the mistakes, and the sins of others. Taking an honest look at **ourselves**, however, is much more difficult. Asking the tough questions, "Is what I am doing helping me and only me? Or is what I am doing helping my family and loved ones?" "Am I spending too much time at work, too much time on my own hobbies, when I should be present and engaged with those who need me most?" In other words, "Are there some personal sacrifices that **can** and **should** be made out of love for others?" Those can be some uncomfortable questions.

One of the Biblical truths which we hold to, based on Romans chapters 6 and 7 is that as Christians, we are at the same time saint and sinner: Perfectly righteous in God's sight for the sake of our Savior Jesus, and yet still engaged in a personal daily battle with sin. Dale Meyer, a former speaker of The Lutheran Hour, writes that "the most dangerous spiritual battles that we face are the ones we don't easily recognize in the '**sinner**' part of our 'saint-sinner' life." Rev. Dr. Meyer continues: "It is those things that **we** do, those attitudes that **we** have, those words that **we** speak that we don't even **know** are sinful." Did you catch that? The most dangerous spiritual battles that we face are the ones whose significance we don't even grasp. Or to put it another way, ***the most dangerous spiritual battles we face are the ones we don't even know we are in!***

As Christians, it's all too easy to see where **others** are falling short and to have blind spots to those things that **we** do that we don't even think are sinful or evil. In a culture that exalts 'me' over 'we' - individualism over community - it's very easy to miss the sinfulness of those attitudes and behaviors that exalt self and undermine the fabric of our life together in community.

In a very real way, that's what Jesus was getting at when He responded to the absurd question that the Pharisees put to Him in our text for today. Let's hear it again:

²Some Pharisees came up and in order to test [Jesus] asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'

⁷"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one

flesh. ⁹What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ¹⁰And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:2-12)

The Pharisees intention was to trap Jesus. The Pharisees’ intention was to get Jesus to speak against that which had been reduced to a commonly accepted practice in order to accuse Jesus of not honoring Moses. The commonly accepted practice was that if a wife was in any way displeasing to her husband, he could simply write a certificate of divorce, send her away, and be done with her. The Pharisees knew this. Jesus knew this. But this had become one of those practices that characterized those unrecognized spiritual battles I mentioned earlier. The sinfulness and self-centeredness of a heart that could look at another human being, and simply at a personal whim get rid of a person – was not what God intended. Jesus told them so!

‘It is because of your hard hearts that Moses permitted this’. It is because you are so ‘me – me – I – I’ centered that you are permitted to walk away from a relationship that God meant to be the joining of heart and body into a oneness that should not be separated by anyone! God made man. God made woman. And when He joined them to be one – He intended for that ‘we’ arrangement to take precedence over the ‘me – me – I – I’ preference. God wanted to bless us in the husband-wife relationship. By giving man and woman to each other, God wanted for us to find our joy and fulfillment in relationship. This was a beautiful expression of God’s love to us.

A little later, the attack against family and community continued. The attack against ‘we’ came from an unrecognized place. It came from people who didn’t even recognize that they were involved in behavior that was displeasing to God. Again, it is important to recognize how **unrecognized** sin is the most **dangerous** to us. But Jesus brings it to light. Let’s read about it:

¹³(People)were bringing children to (Jesus) that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ¹⁶And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Here we find Jesus affirming the role of the smallest and most helpless in the Kingdom – in the community of believers. There were attempts made to keep the children from Jesus. And these attempts to keep the children from

Jesus came from a surprising place - the **disciples!** They tried to keep the little ones from coming to Jesus and being blessed by Him. But Jesus would have none of it. He said, "Let the children come to me!" The community isn't complete without them. It isn't just about 'me - me - I - I'! It is about **we!** It includes husbands and wives AND CHILDREN! And Jesus lifted up and exalted this value by taking the children in His arms and placing His hands on them and blessing them.

God loves husbands and wives and children. The glue that holds families together is **Christ**. As Christ draws us closer to Himself through His loving forgiveness and acceptance, He also draws us closer to each other. As we gather around the Lord's Table as brothers and sisters in Christ, we become united in community by partaking together of this sacred meal for the forgiveness of our sins. As we come together, we find love and support as we mutually bear each other's burdens, woes & cares.

The third stanza of an old, well-loved hymn speaks about this "we" community that God is creating for His children through families and the extended Christian family:

"We share our mutual woes; Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows, The sympathizing tear."

(Blest Be the Tie That Binds, LSB 649, stanza 3)

Do you ever miss that? It is what God intends for His community - for husbands for wives for children for His church- and what Christ came to do through His suffering, death and resurrection! God loves 'we and us' and values what happens when He brings us together in love and peace to form the Body of Christ. So, let's strive for 'we'! Value 'us'! Let the Spirit of God work to unite us using the glue - Christ Jesus Himself!

Jesus gives us His love and forgiveness, and He brings it into our homes. He uses it to renew and rejuvenate the love between husbands and wives, the love between parents and kids, grandparents and grandkids. He gives His love to us freely, without limit, and He enables us to share that love with one another. May His love always be in our homes, our church, and in our community. Amen.