

POWER**B. HULL SOMERS – BLC – 7.8.18***Ezekiel 2:1-5, 2 Corinthians 12:2-10, Mark 6:1-13*

There are an estimated 30,000 different denominations of the Christian faith in the world today. There are at least a thousand different ways to be Lutheran alone.

It is so remarkable that, in just a couple thousand years and some change, that this many different expressions of the same spiritual practice have come to be.

There are many flavors and nuances that claim the title Christianity.

There are Christians that worship on Saturday and those that come to church on Sunday. There are churches with drums in them and others who do not play music at all. There are Christians that believe that women should wear skirts and stay quiet in church and then there are Christians that think women

can be Christian leaders and even – if they so choose – while wearing pants. There are Christians who think that heaven has a certain finite number of inhabitants and others who believe that God's grace comes down in unending supply. There are Christians that feel pacifism is a central tenet to the faith and others who come to church packing heat. There are Christians who don't dance or wear jewelry and there are Christians that have liturgical dancing as part of their worship and sell handmade jewelry to promote their ministries. There are Christians who think the only faithful way to be a Christian is to be politically liberal and others who think that Christianity is only synonymous to political conservatism.

So many different ways of being, of theology and tenets to the faith. All added on and amended through these last couple of thousands of years and all. When these differences are

allowed to create division it is because of one of the most destructive substitutes to faith: certitude. Certitude is the belief, the certainty, that that I am right and you are wrong. And, further, that if you are wrong and I am right, you are my enemy. That to have differences means that we must be at odds with one another.

Certitude is the enemy of mystery. Certitude takes the way of Jesus – the way, the truth and the life – the journey of faith that twists and turns in amazing and unpredictable ways – and makes it a one size fits all trudge to a made up destination. Certitude draws lines that Jesus never drew and exchanges holiness for rules and judgment and violence.

Certitude in the church – a certainty that there is only one way to be Christian – is the reason for tens of thousands of different kinds of churches throughout the world. All safely

ensconced in their places of worship, sure that they are right.

And it is the reason for many wars, for genocide, for the slaughter of innocents, for broken families, for destroyed friendships and on and on and on...

This drawing lines of certitude in the church started early. Before the bottoms of Jesus' feet were through the clouds to be exact. In the first century there were Christians who were obsessed with rules, obsessed with power, obsessed with making sure that folk knew that they were WRONG, and if they wanted to be saved then they would need to get in line, or else.

These ever so certain Christians were making the rounds in Corinth, and some of the Corinthian Christians were starting to listen, so Paul responded with today's lesson.

Certitude is dead.

God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

You cannot KNOW; you can only trust God.

One of my favorite plays on words is, “You want to know, God wants to yes!”

The certain Corinthian Christians were professing their own power through their ability to jump through hoops of their own making and adhering to rules they made up, and Paul expressed a different way to be Christian in the world. Risking the unknown mystery of faith.

Humanity wants to KNOW. Humanity wants to WIN. Humanity wants to CONQUER. Jesus showed us another way.

God became flesh and was born into poverty under questionable social circumstances, homeless on the night he was born, became a refugee fleeing a murderous ruler, grew up to be a drifter with no job, was so rebellious and agitating to

the authorities – religious and otherwise – that he was killed like a common criminal.

But Jesus was pure power. Not the kinds of violence, manipulation and intimidation that we mistake for power, but true power. The power of healing. The power of forgiveness and reconciliation. The power of seeing people for who they really, really are. The power of vulnerability. The power of love.

Even after he rose from the dead he resisted the bankrupt power of humanity. Jesus purposefully showed up after the resurrection showing off his wounds. He conquered the grave so certainly he could have closed up the holes in his hands, his feet, his side. But he did not. Because of how important it was for him to show us that our wounds speak hope. True power. Our weakness points to God's strength. True power. Our

vulnerability, not our perfection, allows others to see the ways that God could create a new day for them. That is powerful.

God's power is made perfect in imperfect us showing up. Jesus and the disciples practiced showing up in our Gospel text this morning; the prophet Ezekiel practiced showing up in our Old Testament; and as we see in both texts it does not always go as planned, but we are called to show up anyway.

We must resist the certitude that would make us feel superior to those who are different from us. We must show love, forgiveness and healing in all that we do. We must show up, offer hospitality, and be willing to have conversations and meals and disagreements and more, now more than ever.

I probably do not have to tell you that our country has become terrifyingly polarized. There is so much certitude going around that we are forgetting that every human being on this

planet, in any country, in any religion, in any political party, is a beloved child of God.

Recently we have watched on the public stage as business owners who are professing their faith by refusing to bake cakes or make flowers for people. We have watched as people get booed out of cinemas and restaurants. We have watched babies being taken from their mothers who risked it all for a new life, much like Mary and Joseph did with their precious Jesus.

We see, every day, new examples of how easy it is to dehumanize in the name of certitude.

But there is another way. It is the way of the power of God.

A way of more mystery and more love. A way where we do not need to know but embrace God's yes. A way that stands up

for the weak while refusing to dehumanize even the oppressor.

Recently I read a thought provoking take on refusing folk service based on their political affiliations.

It was written by Jesuit priest and American magazine columnist, Father Sam Sawyer. He writes, “The way Jesus used table fellowship in the Gospels was morally transformative—but by inclusion, not by exclusion. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, whom the Pharisees turned away from their tables, making these meals signs of hope “not only regarding God’s kingdom but also regarding the kinds of persons who might participate in it.” Rather than demanding change as the price of admission to the meal, Jesus used the meal to enact the change that marks the kingdom of God he came to announce.

Jesus' willingness to eat with tax collectors was not an endorsement of their profession, any more than his counsel to "render to Caesar" was an endorsement of the Roman Empire. That advice about imperial taxes, remember, ended with "and repay to God what belongs to God."

His radical hospitality proclaimed that God lays claim to all of us, the press secretary and the immigrant child together. If we want to bear witness to Christ who is present in our marginalized and excluded brothers and sisters, we need to go beyond civil disagreement and even beyond denunciation. We need to look for opportunities for the kind of encounters in which we can call each other to repentance and conversion. We need to help each other recognize who is already being excluded from our community. We need to hope for and work for the moment when we can all sit at table together.

When we embark on the way of mystery, love and grace we do not condone the evil we see in the world, we bravely offer another way. We reject certitude by standing in the vulnerability of the wounded healer and we show up, broken as we are, and we continue to reach out in love even when we would prefer to draw lines and stay safely with those we agree.

There is no ONE WAY to be a Christian. There are infinite ways to be a Christian. Because each of us is a unique and one of a kind masterpiece of God. Each of us in this sanctuary are different kinds of Christians because we express different, unique and beautiful attributes of the One who formed the stars and made us from the same stardust. NOT perfect but beautifully showing in our wounds, scars, scratches and gifts God's grace. NOT knowing the ONLY way, but instead walking

the mysterious and ever expanding journey of faith and sharing tables with enemies, friends, refugees and strangers. And when we have the faith to reject knowing and instead embrace God's yes, then God does the transforming work in the power of the resurrected love and life of Jesus. Changing hearts, emboldening hope and bringing the Kingdom. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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