

Kevin's Korner

Being sick at home for a few days is hard for me. I like to be busy. I like to accomplish things. I wonder if God sometimes sends an illness along to slow me down a bit. It's been especially hard to sit at home and look at the news of our nation, how cruel and mean we are getting in America. It's always been other, faraway places that are that corrupt and cruel. Not anymore. I guess I'm not the only one experiencing illness in our nation.

We've had some great discussions in our Bible study on the Gospel of Mark. The nation of Israel was a mess in Jesus' time. So many groups, divided, seeking after privilege and power, or survival, in the midst of the vast Roman empire. When you have such divisions, it becomes difficult to communicate between groups and even within groups, because there are such differing perspectives and opinions. The same words mean different things to different people. Especially big words like freedom, safety, responsibility, Truth, prosperity, love.

It gets difficult sometimes today to talk about Jesus' time on earth. Our religious beliefs can be flavored by politics, economics, status, media, etc. Sometimes our Bible study discussions get difficult because we want to avoid being divisive among people we care about so much. And yet, we do want to understand our differing opinions. We want to know each other's concerns for the world and for the church and for ourselves. Bible study tends to lower our shields sometimes and open-up some difficult subjects. It's a good thing we love each other!

In a recent discussion we were talking about so many different viewpoints and opinions today and in Jesus' time. We read about the religious leaders trying to trick Jesus into stepping on some political landmine, so they could get him arrested or shunned. But one of the rabbis noticed Jesus' wise answers that did not cause deeper divisions, and asked Jesus what was the most important commandment from God. Jesus replied, "... 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.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The rabbi was impressed and agreed that these commandments were more important than all religious rituals, to which Jesus replied, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." How far are we in America right now from the kingdom of God when we are so divided about lesser things, hateful and cruel, that we don't come close to loving our neighbors, near and far. Are we loving God in this way? I don't think so.

But we do get a clue about how we can make things better, make a better community, nation and world. Love God and remember that loving neighbor, which includes enemies, even enemies of state, is right up next to that first commandment. In fact, it is the best way to obey the first commandment, to love God. Love others. No exceptions.

Boiling down our differences into the main point of life, which we should all be able to agree on, was Jesus' purpose. It was the truth that cut through all the traps people set for him. It was and is the one way forward toward the kingdom of God. We talked a bit more at Bible study. And I shared that my intent for ending our worship services as I do, is the same. Remember, God loves you, accepts you, and forgives you. Now go and do the same for others. No exceptions. Doing this is a straight shot at the kingdom of God.

Tell me what you think. In fact, talk about it with others as well. Let's bring people together around this truth.

Blessings, Pastor Kevin