

Do we actually believe our faith? Do we gather together on Sunday mornings for an hour, then go about business as usual the remainder of the week? Do we actually trust and believe? Then how could our LORD & Savior, the Son of GOD, declare that "Whoever is not against us, must surely be for us", when repeatedly in the last 25 years our Presidents have declared the OPPOSITE that "whoever is not for us is against us"? Choosing up sides matters in children's games, matters when your team are the Chicago Whitesocks who have lost 121 games this season. Sides matter when you are in a war, but we need to be able to differentiate between all out war and circumstances or disagreements.

The opposite of CONFLICT is not PEACE, the opposite of CONFLICT is APATHY. The opposite of PEACE is not WAR, the opposite of PEACE is FEAR. And the most common affirmation in the Bible is "BE NOT AFRAID." CONFLICT in and of itself, is not evil or bad, we simply disagree. You prefer bold dark colors, I prefer light; you prefer fruit, I prefer chocolate. However, a TEACHER or PASTOR, is supposed to have a level of authority otherwise the students would never listen, and never learn. Historically, this was the basis point in American society, we could agree to disagree, we could respect those in authority to lead. In recent years the world has been changing so rapidly, that a sense of competition has entered into circumstance. We are traveling up Highway 19 at 75-80 miles per hour, yet there is always someone wanting to go faster. The Continental Parking lot has 1000 spaces, but we circle looking for the ones right in front of our store. The question arises, what would you do, to get ahead, to win? Perhaps not to hurt someone, but to inflict DOUBT, SHAME, to cause others to ever question challenging us for dominance. This has become the norm, we have accepted. Not to listen, not to trust, not to believe in authorities, we have become conditioned to live at the 3<sup>rd</sup> intensity of CONFLICT desiring ALWAYS to win, even to consider the costs of winning over losing. When this theory of CONFLICT was first described, the authors THEORIZED that there could possibly come a time in human culture when God forbid GENOCIDE would be considered, the extermination of a race or culture of people, to prevent them or anyone else ever competing with us, disagreeing with us, ever again. How many attempts at GENOCIDE have we named in our lifetimes? How many in the last 5 years?

Jesus' Disciples came to him claiming they saw some others casting out demons in the name of Jesus, and they told them to cut it out, those others were not part of us... BUT Jesus said, "Do not restrain them, no one who does a good deed in my name will be able to speak evil against me. Anyone who gives another a cup of cold water because you belong to the Messiah, will not lose their reward. There was a time, not so long ago, when the churches of our community, the pastors of this community saw themselves in competition with one another?! Since that time, all of the congregations have changed pastors. On the Wednesday before THANKSGIVING, we are going to have an ecumenical THANKSGIVING WORSHIP Service where our whole community is invited to gather together to truly THANK GOD for our Blessings. We have been asked to host, because we have the largest Sanctuary. While we have talked about doing this before, because this invitation came from Pastor Mike Sager at Desert Hills Lutheran, I invited him to preach here, we hope our Choirs will blend together, and we can all GATHER TOGETHER for WORSHIP at 4pm. The following day, we plan to continue having our THANKSGIVING DINNER for the Church and Community.

My thanks to Marcia for guiding us with PSALM 124 as our Call to Worship this morning. PSALM 124 came from the people of faith playing a game of WHAT IF? What would have happened IF GOD had not protected us? If we had not trusted the LORD will provide blessings... What a bold assurance for the beginning of each day: OUR HELP, is in the NAME OF THE LORD, who made Heaven and Earth!

So when we go to sell our home, what do we do? First, we have to convince our partner that this is the time. We check out the ASSISTED CARE facilities we are considering... We consult our INVESTMENTS and

what we can afford... We talk with DOCTORS & NURSES about our physical limitations and whether we can make the move at this time... Then we begin sorting through everything we have accumulated at PATIO SALES since the last time we moved, how to pare down from a whole house with a lifetime of treasures, to a smaller collection of favorite belongings... We consult our children and friends... We find a REALTOR to sell our home and we do everything we can to stage the house for sale... We find movers to help us... Have we forgotten anything? Did we ever think to PRAY? To ask GOD's guidance and blessings for this change in our lives?

When we have Surgery, we consult DOCTORS and SPECIALISTS, which Hospital, What does our Insurance pay for and what do they not, we meet the Anesthesiologists, Technicians, and NURSES who will care for us... We might even consult our ATTORNEYS and our Estate Plan to make certain we have done everything. DID we PRAY to the Great HEALER to preserve our life?

Last Monday, was the 40th anniversary of when I first knelt down to confess the VOWS & LAYING ON OF HANDS in Ordination. FIVE years ago, on Tuesday of this week, we began to serve together. As I have described to many at the door, that I truly cannot be a PASTOR without you being the CHURCH. A great deal has happened in both of our lives over this 5 years. I had had great blessings over a career, and yet came here feeling very broken and wounded in spirit. As a BODY of CHRIST we had been successful, then were struggling to understand the meaning of being that BODY and of RECONCILIATION. Then COVID happened, and we all pivoted to accept and use technology. We accepted new STAFF to guide and assist us. We let go of some things we had done, and accepted making repairs to what was worn.

SO NEXT SUNDAY, we are gathering to give thanks to GOD. 30 years ago, the Interim Pastor I followed became my closest friend. He and his spouse are both ministers and will be joining us in worship, after which, we hope you will join us in a feast to give thanks to GOD for all our blessings. We need to celebrate, GIVING THANKS TO GOD, because it is time!

I would close this morning with a story from many years ago, when I was first a SOLO Pastor of what at the time was a Church of about 200. Thankfully, I have learned many things over time, and now I usually arrive on Sundays just before the Choir. In those days, I would go to the Church about 4:30 in the morning to review the sermon and get settled. On this particular Sunday, I saw a car come into the Parking Lot about 5:30. A woman who was a member of the church got out and came in to see me. She was overwrought, tearful and afraid. She said, "I am a NURSE, who just worked a back-to-back double-shift. Last night a family came into the Emergency Room with their 3 year old child, who had a severe cough going into pneumonia. The doctor directed me to prepare an injection of CODIENE and I did not recognize until after it was administered, that I made a mistake. Instead of CODIENE, I had given her an injection of COCCAINE. Immediately, I saw what I had done, and we administered the Narcan to counteract the drug. The 3 year old will stay in the hospital for observation, but I am overwhelmed by the mistake I made." Listening to her, we prayed together, THANKING GOD that the CHILD appeared to be without permanent harm; ASKING GOD to watch over and protect the child and her family; ASKING FORGIVENESS of this Mistake, and for STRENGTH that GOD would help this woman as she faces the results of her mistake. Drying her tears, she got in her car and drove away.

About 20 minutes later a young couple from the Church came in, I knew them as a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in the congregation, whom I had married and that I had baptized their 3 year old girl and then their infant son. They said "PASTOR, WE JUST HAD THE MOST HORRIBLE NIGHT, AND OUR DAUGHTER IS IN THE HOSPITAL, we want you to pray for her."