

When my father began Preaching in the late 1940s, Preachers' sermons were based on the Preachers' favorite stories. Following VATICAN II there were two Lectionaries, the one we follow being appointed by the Catholic Church; the other by the Anglican Church. Each has 4 Scriptures for each Sabbath. The Gospel Passage for today is JOHN 2: 13-22. That as Jesus was beginning his ministry, he went to the Jerusalem Temple, witnessing the crowds exchanging their money to buy doves and sheep and heifers for Sacrifice, he overturned the Tables of the Money Changers. According to the other Gospels this took place at the end of his life, being one of the reasons the leaders wanted him arrested and crucified. Knowing my flare for the Dramatic, it will not surprise you that on occasion when preaching on that passage I have turned over the COMMUNION TABLE. In our community I feared that if I preached on the MONEY CHANGERS, 10 days before Patio Sale some of you would seek to get rid of your last remaining Pastor, or GOD could smite me for being a Hypocrite! I did appreciate that several of you responded to my describing this in Friday's E BLAST, including one who described that we wait to overturn the Money Changers' Tables until Saturday March 16<sup>th</sup> when putting away the Tables; or that we focus on "turning the tables" in the world.

As part of the Mission Study our Church is doing, the Commission examined a number of studies of our Parish, compared to Arizona and the Nation. When the Mission Report is done and findings reported to the Session and Presbytery, both the Report and all of the work that has gone into this will be available for everyone to read for themselves. What these studies reveal, is that Green Valley is extremely diverse, while many parts of our Country are Red and others Blue, because people in Green Valley come from everywhere other than here, on Social Issues/which have become Political Issues, we are evenly split on every issue. Several have suggested that I preach on this or that issue, and the difficulties are that You may not like what I have to say! And no matter which side of which issue, half of our church will be offended! Besides, we are not gathered here for POLITICS, our TRUST in GOD, our TRUST of One Another is more important.

The one Belief, that 80% of our Community are in total agreement about is "People in the Church do not behave as Jesus would behave!" The 10 Commandments were given that we might become a world with right relationships with GOD and with one another, Yet today, at every level of our society and around the world, Life has become without value, Fraud and stealing are commonplace, Lying and slander is described as fake news. The Sabbath has become just another day, more than taken in vain the name of GOD has been profaned. Beauty, Wealth & Technology are treated as idols for us to bow down to to worship.

Paul was writing to a Corinthian Church that was struggling because of 1) divisions within itself, 2) destructive sexual relationships, 3) arrogance that some had greater faith and gifts than others, and 4) confusion about whom to trust with leadership. Into this cacophony, what answer does Paul provide: The CROSS!

I am sorry to tell you but GOD is not on the side of any division, not Liberals or Conservatives, not the Chiefs or 49ers, Lions or Packers.

As a Pastor who has made a career with congregations resurrect their faith and identity after crises, I can tell you that suicide, sexual relationships and embezzlement are as destructive today as they were then.

20 years ago, I wrote my Doctoral Thesis, I found that churches needed to have 4 essential things: A) Identity as being the Church, we are not a club, family, nice people our CORE is as The Church/the Body of Christ; B) Resources to make a difference, especially people, a building that is not an albatross, a balanced Budget, a healthy Reserve, Undesignated Memorial gifts to change the world; C) Willingness to use those resources; D) and a low level of Conflict/a High level of Trust, because those are in opposition. I

thank GOD for all of the Good Work we are a part of! Especially our being The Church, which takes us right back to Paul emphasizing the CROSS.

As Christians, we have to admit how odd Christianity appears. We claim the most important Divine Action in all History is the shame-filled humiliating execution of a poor Jewish Rabbi at the hands of an occupying Empire. Our central Christian symbol is the ancient equivalent of a Lynching Noose or Electric Chair. Instead of a dramatic demonstration of GOD's Power Creating the Cosmos, Flooding the earth, parting the Oceans, we have public affirmation of weakness, abuse and shame.

YET for Paul, there is no failure in this... There is instead a PARADOX: GOD's Power is the Powerlessness of Christ! There have always been those who bullied and attempt to dominate others into submission, for whom all Faith in GOD appears as FOOLISHNESS, but for those BEING SAVED faith/trust is GOD's POWER.

Among my favorite 20<sup>th</sup> Century Theologians were brothers Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, who were both United Church of Christ: Congregationalist ministers. Richard was the grandfather of one of my closest friends a friend who recently died. Richard said: **"The Cross raises the question whether we need a presupposition beyond the ones we have adopted. The NEW HYPOTHESIS is We are in the process of Being Saved! We are indeed coming through disaster, but suffering does not mean loss. The Cross does not DENY THE REALITY OF DEATH, the Cross REINFORCES That REALITY, HOWEVER, the CROSS denies that DEATH IS FINAL."**

The old Hypothesis was that Death is the end of the story. That premise forecasts a day when we shall be no more, that our lives will not have mattered, which sets in motion a whole series of Defense Mechanisms: Denial, Avoidance, Humor to distract us from our fears, Vigilance to oppose and try to beat Death. The "false wisdom" of our FIGHTING DEATH & PERISHING is that we do not acknowledge the first principle of that Premise: that WE ARE PERISHING. We often start with "SELF-PRESERVATION AS THE FIRST LAW OF LIFE!" So we compete and climb the corporate ladder, getting our children into the best schools, attempting to eradicate others before they have the ability to hurt us.

The world's wisdom responds to Core Christian Values of REPENTANCE & FORGIVENESS with judgement and contempt. Suspicion of all people and their motives, undermines any possibility of reconciliation and community. As crazy as it seems what if instead of the 1<sup>st</sup> Principle of False Wisdom: SELF PRESERVATION, being in Competition for Survival because WE ARE ALL PERISHING; we accept that our BODIES are PERISHING yet that does not matter because our TRUE FIRST PRINCIPLE IS TRUSTING GOD. Not even Death can separate us from the Love of GOD.

At the Patio Sale Volunteers meeting this week, concerns were repeatedly raised regarding security from theft, people changing prices, stealing merchandise, and making items appear broken. Folks, we are The Church, and we have to trust people! Besides which, all of the merchandise being sold was donated for free to the Church! The purpose of the Sale is Fellowship in our Community, as well as getting all of this stuff out of here so we do not need to store it for another year. And by the way, as a side benefit we earn a small fortune for missions. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that We are the Church of Jesus Christ.