

PLUM Pastoral Message

December 2021

“Me Centered” vs. “Other Centered”

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Yes, folks – it is that time of year when American consumerism hits us the hardest. Indubitably, I am confronted by family and friends with the question, “What would you like for Christmas?” It becomes a source of contention because, for me, there is nothing I really need, nor want. So, it takes hours of concentration (which, in all honesty, could be spent on more worthy issues) for both me and close friends and family to produce a suggestion for me, for this holiday season, reinforcing consumerism at its peak. The reality is, I see myself as truly blessed and in need of nothing. In fact, one of the best presents I have received, in recent years, was from my daughter, Jordan, several years ago, when she gave me two pigs towards ELCA World Hunger’s Good Gifts program. That gift helped someone beyond my doors, and I was grateful. Others have done so, since, and that has pleased me to no end. When I take into consideration that I/we, as Americans, make up 5% of the world’s population, as a nation that consumes over 24% of the world’s resources, I realize this is only a drop in the bucket of the ocean of need. I wonder if it can make a difference. But, isn’t that what faith is all about? Isn’t that why Christ came? “It only takes a spark to get a fire going....”, as the words of a familiar hymn state. I pray it can change our focus from “me centered” to “other centered,” remembering those who consume relatively little of God’s creation.

Also, our expectations tend to get us in trouble all the time, especially during emotionally-charged times, such as the holidays. How frequently do we see life through rose-colored glasses? You know, “Is the cup half full or half empty?” We romanticize so much on one side and overlook reality on the other. From my experience of dealing with families and listening to their stories, I would guess there is no other time of the year where our individual and family lives are more in flux. We can move from unbelievable highs to depressing lows, all in a matter of moments. A family celebration can turn into a family squabble, all in the same breath. A comment, a look, or an oversight is misinterpreted, because of an unmet expectation. The anticipation of “I’ll be home for Christmas” turns into, “Is it over yet?” with a volatility that leaves those watching dumbfounded. Who establishes those expectations anyway, if not each of us, individually, because of our culture?

With the gamut of all the possible emotions in play, we must never lose sight of the real meaning for the season. Christmas is a time of hope for the entire world. For those who believe it is a time of anticipation and encouragement. For those yet to believe, it

is a time of promise. Its central theme is, “A Savior is Born, who is Christ the Lord.” For us, who trust in the saving grace of God, the season can and should take on an exceptional meaning. It is not just another holiday; it is the one where we see our Lord step from His deity to our humanity – who makes the promise of our salvation real, by coming to show us the way.

The question is, how do we receive the message and then translate it through our lives to the lives of those around us? If “seeing is believing”, then we must celebrate Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), who came to us in a manger. For most who do not yet believe, incredible as it may seem, we become that image of Christ for them.

So, as Christians, how are we doing? How can we make a real difference this year? It seems as though nothing is “normal.” And, frankly, many do not like this new “abnormal” that has overtaken us through COVID, not to mention global warming that will change our lives dramatically this next decade. Yes, I am aware we are not the biggest “culprit” out there, but we most certainly cause more than our fair share of the earth’s damage, because of our consumption. What happens if we ask ourselves questions like; “As people watch us, do our lives bring them to faith or leave them wondering with, so you call yourselves Christians?” Are we examples of this invisible God who loves us - or of the very visible world that consumes us? It is time to be intentional. Advent, as a time of preparation, is upon us. Let us make a difference this year, and throughout the coming year, for those who want and need a Savior – who is Christ the Lord – whether it is in our family, community, globally or perhaps all three.

In Christ’s Service,

Pastor John J. Gropp

PRIVATE COMMUNION

Anyone not able to attend worship services and who would like to receive Holy Communion at their home, (following COVID-19 protocols) please contact your church office or one of the pastors:

Pastor John 412-680-7867,

Pastor Brenda 412-390-8005, or

Pastor Sue 412-496-4889