

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany-Year A

January 30th, 2010

Acts 4:1-20; Matthew 22:34-40

Theme: "When Life is Aligned with God"

This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace be with you all.

It's hard to believe that it is the final Sunday in January and a lot has happened this month.

Destructive floods ravaged the lands in Sri Lanka and Australia.

A tragic gun shooting in Tucson, Arizona killed six people and wounded 13...US Representative Gabrielle Giffords has inspired many with her strength.

Oprah shared that she has a half-sister.

And, if you haven't heard already, the Green Bay Packers are going to the Super Bowl.

As the month comes to an end we can reflect on what has happened, we do the same as our four week sermon series "Life Aligned with God" ends today. We focused on key aspects of our faith that lead us to align our lives on God's guidance. Align our lives as we live out our various callings at home, work, and elsewhere.

We began with baptism with emphasis on the baptism of Jesus. It was then that we received our foundational identity as forgiven and beloved children of God.

We continued on to the question 'Where do I start to align my life with God?' We saw how the shepherds, after being the first people to greet baby Jesus, simply returned back to what they were doing. Like them, alignment with God begins right where we are in the tasks of each day.

Last week, with the story of Zacchaeus, Pastor Heather described how grace, gratitude and gumption are ways in how we align our lives with God.

Today, with our theme 'When Life is Aligned with God' I want to focus on a simple phrase, a phrase that many of us may be aware of. It on various items from shirts to water bottles. A company has their name from this phrase. So today, we'll see that

"When Life is Aligned with God...Life is Good."

When we talk about our lives and where our faith is placed within the natural and social order of daily life, as we have done throughout this series, we do so under the doctrine of creation. This doctrine simply states that nothing exists for which God is not involved. The key understanding is that God did not create only in the beginning 'once upon a time', but in every moment-God is creating. We depend on God for who we are, what we have, the relationships we hold.

For example, I invite you to join me in taking a deep breath. Ah...that was God.

Let's go back to the creation story of the Bible since therein is a foundational element of our being. We recall God's response to all that was created, we read, "God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good**." (Genesis 1:31)

This on-going creative work of the divine is essential since it is the primary factor in how we live and nurture our faith. If we do not believe God is present and creating anew each day, why then align our lives with God, nurture the faith we have, and live under the teachings of Jesus Christ? All is not necessary if faith in God's presence each day is not primary.

On the flip side, various life experiences can erode the claim of God's creation being '**very good**'.

There is the phrase "it's a godforsaken world".

We watch the evening news and read the papers. We see and hear how sin and brokenness is so prominent in the world. The apostle Paul wrote in the third chapter of Romans, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." God's creation was good and sin entered the picture not just 'once upon a time'. We continue to see it in the world and even in our own lives...the deeds that were done, the words that were said that have tarnished our lives and that of others. Adversity becomes the by-product.

Adversity has a way of cutting us down, testing the core of our beings. It will either strengthen our deepest beliefs or unravel the fabric of our faith. Everything depends on how we respond to such situations.

Adversity is present when a son or daughter really doesn't want to come to church but as a parent, you hold to the long-standing benefits of worship and a community of faith.

Adversity is present at the school cafeteria when another kid is being mean, but you know that you can rise above such behavior.

Adversity is present when your drained and frustrated by various tasks, yet your faith lends to you being careful about how you then react to others.

When our lives are aligned with God, we hold to the claim that God continues to be present and create goodness in a sinful world. We are called to be a part of that creation.

If I asked you, what is the greatest speech in history? You may recall the 'dream' shared by Martin Luther King, Jr. or John F. Kennedy encouraging all Americans to ask what they can do for their country. Both talked about adversity, hope, and the alignment of everyone around a shared pursuit of goodness for all.

The reading we heard today from Acts chapter four is a speech of similar caliber given by Peter and John, two of Jesus disciples. You may recall Peter was the disciples who denied three times that he knew Jesus just before Jesus was nailed to his cross.

Back in Acts chapter three, Peter and John healed a man crippled from birth. Scholars

believe this man was around 40 years old. Friends of his carried him to the temple and he would then beg for money from those who worshipped there.

He asked Peter and John for money. Peter said they didn't have any but in looking the man in the eye, he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

In taking the man by the right hand, he began to walk. Everyone in the temple recognized the crippled beggar who was now walking and praising God. They naturally then gravitated to Peter and John in amazement.

Here in chapter four, Peter and John are on trial before 71 religious leaders that make up the legal body of the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees were behind Peter and John being on trial. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of Jesus and were the primary instigators in the trial of Jesus Christ. So, we can obviously infer their anger over what these two disciples had done in their temple. One Bible scholar wrote that "the leaders and God are aligned on opposite sides as the apostles bear witness.

It wasn't just that a man was healed. But, Peter and John were uneducated, ordinary people who lacked any rhetorical or theological education. The boldness and the freedom of their speech was all that more surprising and impressive! And who is standing next to them during the speech, the man who was healed. It's an inspiring scene!

The Sanhedrin were in a bind and preaching and healing was not a legal offense! Their decision was to order Peter and John to stop preaching and healing.

Peter and John defiantly responded they would disobey stating "we cannot help speaking about what we have heard and seen."

Martin Luther, the man who broke away from the Roman Catholic church and sparked the Reformation for which this denomination is named, was in a similar situation.

At the Diet of Worms, he was on trial for being an outlaw, sparking upheaval within the Roman empire and defying the pope. Emperor Charles V stated in an edict that Martin Luther was a notorious heretic and should be apprehended and punished. Punishment would have surely been execution.

This gathering would allow Luther to either renounce or reaffirm his views.

Before Charles V, advisors and representatives from Rome and Germany, there was a table full of stacks of books. Charles asked him two questions: Have you written these books? If so, was there a part of he you would now choose to recant?

Luther's answer to the first question was, "The books are all mine and I have written more.

He asked for time to discern his answer to the next question.

In the evening of the following day, amid the gathering of lanterns and candles, Luther responded to the question, "Will you recant or not?"

“Unless I can be instructed or convinced by evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open clear and distinct grounds and reasoning-my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

The gift we have from God is the witness of faithful men and women who have lived lives aligned with God. It is through them that we witness the marvelous and wonderful creative power of God in the world. A power that shows forth the goodness of God amid the sin and adversity we experience.

When life is aligned with God, we have a bold confidence in God’s gift of forgiveness and grace since we receive such gifts daily.

When life is aligned with God, we have a testimony to share solely dependent on our relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer, worship, the sacraments, and healing.

When life is aligned with God, we have the evidence of our faith in words and actions that show others God’s goodness and love. Our words and actions stand by us, sto to speak, just as the healed man stood next to Peter and John and thousands stood outside in support of Martin Luther.

As a forgiven and loved child of God, your calling is to continue to daily live out the aligning words of Jesus Christ. When Jesus was being questioned by the Sadducees and Pharisees regarding what was the greatest commandment, he aligned the world to God with this phrase:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Indeed, we have been blessed in many powerful ways.

Amid various challenges and thanksgivings, when life is aligned with God...life is good!

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

