

“An Inconvenient Truth”

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-25

September 27, 2009

Mark 9:38-50

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

Humanity is sitting on a ticking time bomb.

Such is the first phrase on the home page of the website for the movie ‘An Inconvenient Truth.’

In 2006, this documentary opened in theaters as a means to educate everyone about the harsh reality of global warming. This film was well received by many throughout the world. It received three standing ovations at the highly regarded Sundance Film Festival.

The photos, detailed graphs and statistics attest to the drastic abuse humanity has brought upon our planet. Abuse with shocking affects. Such as if the polar ice cap melts, sea levels would increase by twenty feet. The result would include the World Trade Center Memorial being under water and refugees would number in the hundreds of thousands throughout the world with the greatest amount being in China and India.

The facts show an ‘inconvenient truth’ to emphasize that key elements of daily living need to be addressed to preserve our earth.

In a similar light, our gospel reading this morning is startling, detailed, and shocking! Christ boldly gives us an ‘inconvenient truth’ relative to discipleship as a means to assess our daily lives and commit ourselves to the God who is committed to us.

Amid the plethora of news reports, songs, television shows and commercials and the various activities that consume our time...great benefit resides in the shocking. Shocking by having that edge to grab our attention, to take notice, and perhaps gain our support, our dollars, or our time. Reality television, such as American Idol and the Biggest Loser, are great at this marketing. At the end of a segment they give us a glimpse of what may happen next in order to peak our interest.

It is this shocking element of the unknown where the underlying purpose resides...that being, our commitment.

Our commitment to this television show. To not change the channel but remain fixated through the commercials.

This morning, the gospel writer of Mark presents us to a piece of scripture that is shocking to the point that we may not want to flip the page right away. These words about cutting off a hand or a foot, or plucking out an eye if either leads to sin. This is one of the few passages where Jesus refers to hell. These words are not to be discarded simply as historical or not relevant today since they are so outlandish.

Such sentiments by Christ were exaggerated in order for the disciples to clearly understand Christ’s central teaching.

I’m sure the disciples were, like us, distracted by various things in a given day and here Christ is finally getting their attention on a key matter of faith. Gone is any eloquence similar to his sermon on the mount where they heard ‘blessed are the meek for the will inherit the earth’. Here Christ doesn’t hold anything back. His shocking words are a challenge for us, like the initial disciples, to examine the quality of our Christian discipleship. His words state an ‘inconvenient truth’ to address those elements that get in the way of our relationship with God and how we nurture and live out our faith. Elements that are stumbling blocks getting in the way of the faithfulness we seek to live out.

Mark Twain once said relative to sin, “We are all like the moon. We all have a dark side we want no one else to see.”

An ‘inconvenient truth’ gets at the heart of who we are as we assess our relationship with God to remove whatever is tarnishing that relationship. A relationship that affects our relationships with others.

Some of us may need to remove those sins from the past and the guilt within. Eyes that look only at measuring up to others or hands that refuse to reach out to forgive. Frustration in not having the strong faith you once felt you had. Lack of understanding the intimidating nature of God's word. There is an 'inconvenient truth' for all of us that needs to be addressed.

Jesus knows about our failure to follow through with our promises and commitments. The effect of sin leads us away from the life God wants us to have. These words call us back to God as they are based with love and genuine concern for our wellbeing.

Cal Ripken, Jr. was a professional baseball player for the Baltimore Orioles...the only team he played for in his 20 year career. He is known best for breaking Lou Gehrig's consecutive game record of 2,132 games. Cal broke the 56 year record in 1995 and went on to play in 2,632 consecutive games. He hit a homerun on the night he broke the record and that game was voted by baseball fans as 'the most memorable moment in baseball history.' He fittingly earned the nickname, 'The Iron Man' for his reliability to show up for work every day.

One of the most admired qualities today is commitment. Commitment being the ability to singularly focus on one objective and move forward with an underlying conviction and passion towards a goal. Goals reside in various realms such as a job, a project in school, a marriage, or an athletic event.

Commitments can be received as overbearing or a means of restriction in behavior. In that light, we can see around us that we live in a time of failed commitments where the short-term quest is paramount.

Our economy has shown how people borrow money with little commitment in the long-term value of saving for that big or 'got to have' purchase that is needed right now.

Marriage commitments based on the powerful words 'until death do us part' are being eroded by selfish pursuits as the 'grass looks better on the other side'.

Churches and religious convictions are not immune to a shortage of commitment relative to church life and worship. Vacancies are present to assist in ministry programs as a means to nurture the faith of children, youth, and adults.

This loss of commitment pervades various walks of daily life. At times, we over-extend ourselves with too many commitments. We fulfill what we can as time allows or what has the greatest benefit here and now. At other times, apathy and selfishness remove any sense of fulfilling certain promises.

The looming question is, "To what are you committed?"

Since "we become what we are committed to."

A regular exercise on college campuses is for professors to consider their demise and to reflect on what matters most to them. Carnegie Mellon had a 'Last Lecture Series' for years. Randy Pausch was a professor there when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. His family included a wife and three children...age 5, 2, and one.

He had been given the September slot on the schedule. At the time, he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, one in 37, 000 Americans are diagnosed with such a condition. Yet, he was optimistic that he could do the lecture. He and his wife disagreed on him presenting such a lecture given the length of time it would entail to prepare. Such time that would be taken away from her and the three children.

After he and his wife had lengthy visits with a psychotherapist, he wife conceded to the lecture. Randy talked about his legacy and finally his wife relented with his words, "One thing I've learned, it that when parents tell children things, it's doesn't hurt to get some external validation. If I can get an audience to laugh and clap at the right time, maybe that would add gravitas to what I'm telling the kids."

He began with a lesson he learned from his dad, if there's an elephant in the room, address it. I agree that that truth, if acted upon, would make many lives easier.

So, just like Al Gore with his inconvenient truth, he clicked to show the first slide titled 'The Elephant in the Room'. It was a CT scan of his liver with arrows pointing to each of the ten

tumors. 'Doctors told me I have three to six months of good health left. That was a month ago, so you can do the math.'

After stunned silence, he said, "Alright. That is what it is. We can't change. We just decide how we'll respond. We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."

Jesus says to the disciples, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in your lives and be at peace with one another."

Over time, salt does become stale and it is lost.

Each of us, as baptized children of God, are salt in the world...each equipped with unique God-given gifts and abilities that can easily be lost over time. Lost if the commitment to use those gifts is wavering or not present.

There is nothing more tragic than love that is lost, generosity that is kept to oneself, or a friendship that is not shared.

God's love shown in Jesus Christ was an inconvenient truth in the eyes of many. An inconvenience as Jesus leads us still today to deepen our relationship with God. To celebrate the gifts and people in our midst. And to feverishly on to the forgiveness and grace shown in the cross of Jesus Christ. A symbol of commitment that we are always in God's care.

Jesus' words today are an inconvenient truth....shocking, detailed, and stunning. In this gift of life that we share...we cannot change the cards we are dealt, but we can change how we play the hand.

- 1) Renewing our commitment to prayer...taking time to remain connected with God...in any part of the day.
- 2) Commitment to the faith life of our children...living out our baptismal responsibilities as parents and as a congregation when we say 'I do' to the newly baptized. Praying with, leading and teaching such young people.
- 3) Commitment to those key elements that we would share if we had our own 'last lecture'.

Jesus continues to look out for you as your guide in all that you do each day. Using harsh words out of an endless love. A love where your life is empowered by a God-given joy that resonates into the lives of others.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.