

## Pentecost 5 Proper 10 – Year C – Track 2 - 7-14-2019

John Pavlovitz is described as an American Christian pastor and author, known for his social and political writings from a liberal Christian perspective. Someone sent me a link to one of his more recent articles. The title was, “If Your Church is Silent Right Now You Should Leave It.” In it, he says, “If your faith leaders can’t find their prophetic voices to defend children caged like animals and isolated from their parents and refused refuge, are they really worth looking to for guidance on how to live one’s faith, know God’s will, or emulate Jesus? If they have silent tongues and feet of clay in these days, why should you remain and nurture such moral impotence?” He doesn’t end there, but goes on: “This isn’t about protecting the line between Church and State, it’s about not separating believing and living. It’s about demanding that local churches and their leaders fulfill their greatest calling: delivering the Gospel of Good News to the poor and the orphans and the widows, regardless of the cost.” He says in many different ways that if you don’t hear the Gospel mandate of Jesus to care for the least among us addressed in your church, you should get up and leave.

I thought on that long and hard – and decided I would rather have people walk out because I *preached the Gospel* than because I didn’t.

It doesn’t take an advanced degree to see the connection between today’s Gospel and all the current debates about the treatment of people at our southern border. Perhaps the synchronicity is another sign of God’s sense of humor. But I think we also need to take a closer look at this Gospel. The lawyer – whom Luke disparages as having come to test Jesus – is perhaps just asking the question we are all asking, really: What do I have to do to be living in the kingdom of God? What should I do?? He is a lawyer, so Jesus asks him what the law says is the answer. This is the same law we heard in the first reading when Moses tells the people, “this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you...it is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” And so the lawyer responds appropriately and correctly: Love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus tells him he has it right. “Do this, and you will live.” But the lawyer isn’t satisfied – partly, perhaps, in the same way that we are not satisfied with that answer. Because – how do we *know* when we’re loving God with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength? How do we *know* we are loving our neighbor as ourselves? - So Jesus tells the story we know as the “Good Samaritan.”

In the time of Jesus, in the Hebrew scriptures themselves, “neighbor” was understood to be those in one’s own clan, one’s tribe, one’s “own,” in other words. So when Jesus tells this story, and the Levite and priest see and then pass by the man who had been beaten and left half-dead, and pass by *on the other side*, that is scandal – because the Torah said they were to care for their neighbors. And when Jesus says a *Samaritan* is the one who provided the care, a Samaritan who didn’t worship God in the right place, that’s another scandal. But notice the question Jesus then asks. While the lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” - Jesus asks, “Which of these *was a neighbor?*” Jesus is expanding the definition of neighbor – beyond the boundaries of those in our group, those we know, those we are comfortable with, those we can agree with. Our neighbor is the one who tends us in our need – and the ones who need us.

The previous definition of “neighbor” – as those in our own group – lets us categorize the world into “us” and “them.” We should not go there. The difference between the response of the Levite and Priest and the response of the Samaritan is this: The Levite and Priest SAW the man, and then passed by on the other side. The Samaritan, when he saw him, *was MOVED with compassion*. And from that compassion – that “feeling with” – he responded. He drew near, and was moved, and responded.

Louis Pasteur, the French biologist, microbiologist and chemist renowned for his discoveries of the principles of vaccination, and his remarkable breakthroughs in the causes and prevention of diseases, said this: “One doesn’t ask of one who suffers: ‘What is your country and what is your religion?’ One merely says, ‘You suffer, this is enough for me. You belong to me and I shall help you.’”

We have our own situation of seeing people in need. And I’m sure you have read or thought what I saw in a comment made to a prayer for immigrants that someone wrote. The comment said, “Give me a reason I should be more concerned about immigrant children than our own children.” This is not an either/or situation. It is “both/and.” The children at the border are not less than the children in your own family pictures. My 15-year old nephew is not more a child of God, nor worth more than the 12-year old Guatemalan boy who said he was afraid to ask the guards at the camp for more food because he saw another child get yelled at for that.

Two things are happening simultaneously here. First, we are regarding “others” – specifically those who don’t look like white America – as less than human. And secondly, we are wearing down the standards for humane treatment of others. We are becoming morally bankrupt.

Ruth Bloch, a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor, knows what a concentration camp looks and feels like. And she has no doubt these are concentration camps. She said about these detention facilities: “I feel because I have been in a concentration camp, I do understand that this is beyond human behavior.” Beyond human behavior.

Do you see? We are making ourselves less human – the border patrol guards, the persons charged with detaining the immigrants, the public servants – they are being put in situations where they are told to engage in behavior that is not human. It is not human to cage other humans. In addition to the harm we are causing these immigrant children, we are creating generations of people who will suffer from MORAL damage – because we have told them to treat others inhumanely.

The voice of Desmond Tutu speaks the truth: “To dehumanize another inexorably means that one is dehumanized as well.”

The answer to the question, “What must I do?” is there for us – to love God with our entire heart and mind and strength and soul – and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We cannot continue our present course as a people and claim that we are doing either. It was announced earlier this week that today there will be planned raids by ICE in major cities to arrest and deport “illegal” immigrants. What that will really do is cause more family separation, as adults will be taken and children left behind.

Take the Collect home with you. Pray it every day. And then act as the Spirit moves you. Be moved, and act. “O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that we may know and understand what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them. Amen.”

[Deuteronomy 30:9-14](#) [Psalm 25:1-9](#) [Colossians 1:1-14](#) [Luke 10:25-37](#)