

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Envy or Equity?

Welcome to Zion Lutheran Church in our fifth Wednesday in our Lenten season. Please join me in a word of prayer. Almighty, Eternal God, it is so easy to fall into a life driven by envy. Especially during these prophetically, sinful times when envy is masked as equity. Fill us with your Spirit, so that we might be beacons of contentment. Knowing that we are your unique creation, created with purpose and redeemed through the blood of your very own son Jesus Christ; who has promised that He will never leave us, nor forsake us; and who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God; now and forever, Amen.

Well tonight is a special night; we continue in our journey looking at the seven deadly sins and their counterparts the seven heavenly virtues. We've seen greed and generosity; sloth and zeal. Last week was lust and love. And you probably thought that's the number one, that's the big one because sex sells. But I have this very, very, bad feeling that tonight's sin, envy is number one like a rocket. And not just number one, like a rocket; it is so prophetic, it's almost ridiculous.

I hear over and over from people, all walks of life saying, 'we're living in crazy times.' Let me tell you the reason they are crazy times is because they are prophetic times. When we look at the Prophet Isaiah chapter 5; we hear about a time that will come and it came for Israel and for Judah back 450 to 700 years before Christ. But we've seen it coming back ever since, over and over, with every different civilization. It's when people, society, government educators call darkness, light and light, darkness. They called bitter, sweet and that which is sweet, bitter; that which is evil is called good, and that which is good is called evil.

See this is the baseline, the context, the foundation, upon which we now journey forth. We are living in a prophetically, sinful, world and much of that sin finds its root cause, its seed, its root, in envy and equity. On the face of it, equity is very good. By definition, equity is the process of being fair and impartial. And if you want equity look no further than your Bible and God. God who created the entire universe, created us

humans in His own image, giving us freedom of choice. We chose poorly, we continue to choose poorly. But God loves His creation, He understands exactly what is needed to save His creation and there needs to be a payment for sin. And God so loved His creation, that He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross to make payment for all. Because we read that '*whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.'

God did not choose any race; He did not choose any gender and He did not choose any religion. He died for everyone; that those who put their faith in Him, in Christ Jesus the promised Messiah; might have eternal life. That's equity. If you believe Jesus, you're saved. It doesn't matter what your background was, what your upbringing is, it doesn't matter your gender or any of that. If you turn to Christ for salvation, He is the one who saves those who put their faith in Him. And God is so equitable, that He doesn't force this on anybody. There's no rules that say you must believe or I will smite you for not believing. No, He came to save everybody. If you reject it, well then you don't get it, and yes then you are condemned. But that's your choice. You've rejected the Messiah. That's fair. That's equitable. If you read the Bible; It's laid out there clear as can be. Have Jesus, have Salvation. No Jesus, no Salvation.

But what we call equity today, is far from that. We see protests in cities, and well it's the equitable thing to do, and it's called a peaceful protest. Meanwhile, if you instead, decide to quietly protest and have a pro-life rally and pray for the unborn that they may not be aborted; that's hate speech. Do you see that light being called darkness and darkness being called light? But it's gone so much further here recently. Where now we are being told that everything in society, everything in our country, and our government, our history; everything is a product of white privilege and it must all be removed. It affects our schools; because math is a construct of white privilege. We need to understand that while the laws of science have shown us that there is gravity that always pulls things back to the earth; that if someone doesn't believe in that, that's OK because that's the product of white privilege and science was driven by so many white people.

It affects our history we need to know look past the white privilege, go back deeper to our or true heritage or true culture. And that's why now in the California curriculum and history has the children singing, chanting to the Aztec gods. Heaven forbid that you pray to Jesus, we can't do that because of separation of church and state. What are the answers? We see there's a cry for reparations. We need to send money. Give money to people whose people in the past generations, the past may have experienced racism. We need to change the entrance rules for college. We can't use the ACT and the SAT anymore. They are racist. We even have an equity index for who gets the covid vaccinations and well you have to meet a certain equity index to get out of the purple Tier.

The reality is, this is not equity. It is what the Bible calls envy and it is a sin. Now understand, envy is not greed. Greed is wanting more. I have this, I want more and more and more. No, envy takes it outside of yourself. You see biblical envy is, 'I want what you have, and what you have, and what you have and you must give it to me. You see biblical envy can be summed up like this. It's being angry or resentful about someone's success but rejoicing and being gleeful in their failure. It's truly an, us versus them, and it's an absolute reversal of what we are taught in Romans 12:15 that we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. No, envy says 'weep when someone is rejoicing, because they don't deserve it. And rejoice when someone is weeping because they finally got their just desserts.' It's what we see in these protests people cheering because his business is burned to the ground.

And it is what we see on Calvary as the religious leaders jeered at Jesus on the cross. They were happy to see Him dying. And after all, that is why He was there. You might say, "what?" Yes, Jesus was on the cross because God so loved the world, he sent his only begotten son but how did he get there? When we look at Matthew chapter 27 verse 18; this is what we read Jesus was before Pilate. And Pilate has just offered to the Jewish, religious leaders, a choice. They can have released for them Barabbas, a murderer and insurrectionist; or Jesus who is called the Christ. And why did he make this offer to them? I quote, "for he, that is Pilate, knew that it was out of envy that they the religious leaders had delivered Him, Jesus." It was envy that led to Christ's crucifixion.

Those religious leaders were so busy looking at Jesus and saying, 'he shouldn't be the one who's teaching, we should be the one doing parables; we should be the ones doing the miracles, we should be the ones that hold the truth, the people should be worshipping us. They should be following us. We have given our whole lives to this. We are the Pharisees. We are the Sadducees, we're the chosen ones. We are the priesthood of Aaron. We deserve it, not Him! And when they didn't get it, it was envy that led them to seek his crucifixion.

And when we look at the Bible, we see envy, shall we say, splattered across the pages. After all, it was envy that led Cain to kill Abel. It was envy that let Joseph's brothers to want to kill him and then to sell him into slavery. And at the same time, it was envy that led those same brothers to break their father's heart. It was envy that led King Saul to try to kill King David. It was envy that led to Korah's rebellion against Aaron and Moses in the wilderness. It was envy oh and this one, it is just so remarkable at how it has so many overtures today; it was envy that led King Ahab to tell Queen Jezebel that he wanted Naboth's vineyard. And it was envy that led her to work with the governing authorities to make sure that Naboth was executed; and she could then take that property and gave it to her husband. It was envy led Haman try to kill Esther's uncle Mordecai.

So, when we look at the Bible, it is no wonder that it addresses envy and warns us about it. James 3:16 "For when you love envy and selfish ambition, you find disorder and every evil practice." Welcome to 2021! Is that not what we see right now? We see envy, which leads to selfish ambition, and the result is disorder and every evil practice. It is why Peter writes and says, 'rid yourselves therefore of all malice and all guile insincerity, envy and all slander.' Do you notice how envy is in the middle there? It's because, it's the root of all of those others: slander, malice, guile, insincerity, all find their root in envy. Jesus was killed out of envy. They wanted what He had, and we find ourselves in an envious, equitable mess today.

Thankfully there is an answer and it's found in the Bible! Philippians 4:11 "I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances." That's Paul. He had a lot of circumstances; shipwrecked, stoned,

whipped. He was content in all circumstances. That's what he tells the young preacher Timothy; "but godliness with contentment is great gain." Contentment, we need to forsake envy and the resentment that comes with envy and cultivate contentment. How do we do that? Well, I was going to start by saying number one, repent. But I think actually, before we can even repent, we need to refocus. We need to stop looking at everybody else and put ourselves right in a bathroom in front of the biggest mirror we can find and look in the mirror. Focus on you, and who you are; what God wants you to do, who God wants you to be and quit looking at everybody else.

I think that when we look at ourselves and quit looking everywhere else; and we see ourselves, that will lead us to repent. Because we will be able to identify envy, equity in our lives and see that it has been nothing that is in any way godly or equitable. This is why we are warned about it. It's because we're all susceptible to it, and as I worked on this sermon it took me back to my first memory of envy. It was Christmas. I asked for a new bicycle and I got it. A nice Red Derby, single speed, bicycle. And my buddy Phillip Kinkel got it 10 speed, with dual lever shifters, and ram horn handlebars and a real skinny uncomfortable seat that I thought was the coolest thing ever. And so, the day that I saw him crash, it I was so happy. That is envy, and I learned a lesson in it. It troubled me, I talked with my parents about it, and it was identified. It's because it's a sin. You're envious. Refocus, repent, remember you are unique in God's eyes.

This is lost on us again in society, it's lost on the world of education and science, as we are taught that we are the product of a random chance explosion. You are not! The Bible tells us in Psalm 139; "For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, my soul knows it very well." Look in that mirror and just gaze at your eye and ask yourself, how does that thing work? How does that brain work? How does my nose, how does the sense of smell work? How did those taste buds work? Literally stick your tongue out and look at it. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. This is part of why Paul could be content in all circumstances. He knew who he was, and he found value in being God's creation and in being God's child. Remember also

that that God who created you is in control. He knows you better than you do. It's in Matthew 10:29 that we read that he knows the very number of hairs on our head. He knows everything we're going through, and He is the one who tells us that nothing can separate us from His love for us through Jesus Christ. Romans 8:38 Remember that, you're God's creation, He's in control and take stock and be thankful in that. That's why Paul writes to the Thessalonians and says 'give thanks in all circumstances.' Understand, no matter what you're experiencing, no one can take that away from you.

But there are those who will try take that joy away. And so we pray for those who are driven by envy. Because it's a sad and sorry life when you have no value of yourself the only value you can get is by, 'we're trying to take value from others.' I'm afraid we find ourselves back at the Garden of Eden, back there at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We can look at the greed, the lust, slothfulness, you're all pretty apparent. But envy it is so easy to look at our brother, our sister, neighbor and the one with the hair; to rejoice as they lose it, to want them to lose, it and that is where we bow, we repent, and we ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to not pick that fruit and embark on a life of envy; but cut it off and graft in contentment.

When it comes to contentment, that requires spiritual transformation. But I believe Hebrews 13:5 may just help with that transformation. Be content with what you have." Now here's the interesting part. What do you have? Hold that thought. Here is what the Bible says: Be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And there is my challenge; try to beat that. You see, as we go down this road looking at envy, equity, others, ourselves; and we refocus and we look in the mirror, we see that we are unique in God's eyes, that he is in control, that He has made us special, but that He who has died on the cross, rose, redeemed us, gave the promise of heaven. He will never leave us or forsake us. We have it all!

I'm here in the sanctuary all by myself, preaching, recording, and your watching, listening at home. Jesus is right here with me. He's right there with you, wherever you may be, whoever you are. It doesn't matter because if you have put your faith, hope and trust in Him, that is

what you have His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And this, dear brothers and sisters in Christ is what we must rejoice in. What we must give things do not resent what you don't have cultivate contentment and embrace what you do have God's only begotten son in His name, Amen.

Almighty, Eternal God, it is so easy to fall into the trap of envy. It's so easy to try to mask it with a word called equity or equitable. Father, You alone are equitable, You love your creation so much you sent your son to die for all who totally put our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus Christ. And we rejoice daily, hourly, in knowing that He will never leave us. Yes, that our journey with you is done, we will continue for all eternity. In Christ's precious name we pray. Receive now God's blessing may the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, may He lift up His countenance upon you and give you His peace. So go, be content, walk with Jesus, because He is right there with you. Amen