



Do you know the vision of St. John's? "We are committed to God, to our church, and to each other as a family in Christ, providing and cherishing spiritual growth, and witnessing our faith to the community at large."

All that we do here -**and** when we are out and about as St. John's- should refer back to this vision. What we do and say evidences our core values of worship, inclusion and community.

Thursday afternoon many of us gathered at First Christian to help with the Mobile Food Pantry *aka* Food Finders. This was the first of our "Five for Fifty" outreach program. It was a rousing success.

We helped those for whom food security is an issue. We had a good time being together with

our neighbors. The willingness to pitch in and help in whatever way the organizers requested- even to taking tables back downstairs at First Christian when we were through!- and to bagging jalapenos and ending up with hands sticky with juice- was love in action.

The Gospel of Luke is a familiar story to many of us. Kent Bohls, a Lutheran pastor in Austin, Texas, offers some thoughts to consider. He says:

The man possessed in our gospel "had worn no clothes and did not live in a house, but a tomb. Our story then ends with Jesus saying, "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." I wonder about the strangeness of a homeless man being sent home.

Ultimately we ask then, "Where is that place, that home?" Most of us have lived at more than one address during our lifetime. When asked where we are from, we have to think about our answer and decide which feels like home.

I imagine Jesus is thinking of something beyond a physical place and an address. Could he be saying, "Go where you are safe, where you experience love, where you discover the place where you fit in." Our formerly possessed man may not have had a place that fits any of those thoughts. Maybe Jesus is talking to us. How do our faith communities welcome others? How do we create a safe loving place that all are invited to discover?

How do we create a home for all?"¹⁾

I hope that our outreach to Food Finders, to the two Strawberry Festivals, to Habitat and coming up this week with Summer Lunches are evidence that St. John's is a place- and is made up of people- that welcome others. I hope that this is a safe, loving place that all are invited to discover.

Our lesson from First Kings reminds us that God shows up in unexpected places and ways. If we truly are – as we say we are in our vision- committed to God, then we need to be aware that God shows up in unexpected places and ways. The prophet Elijah fled into the wilderness because he was afraid for his life. In fact, Elijah was so afraid that he asked that he might die- and this from a man who had just recently showed that God of the Israelites was real while the god of Ahab and Jezebel was unable to bring fire to an altar.

Elijah was so afraid of the consequences of speaking truth to power by calling upon God to consume the altar including the sacrificial animal, the wood, the stone and dust and the water, that Elijah simply wanted to lie down and die. But the Lord wasn't through with Elijah.

"Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by... And there was a wind. And there was an earthquake, and there was a fire. And there was the sound of sheer silence." No more running from God. No more covering up the word of God through distractions such as wind and fire and earthquakes. God was present in the wind and fire and earthquakes- Elijah just couldn't hear God. If we are truly alert to God, then we need to be ready to hear God in unexpected places and at unexpected times.

In the sound of sheer silence, Elijah heard the Lord. And what happens? The Lord sends Elijah back to work some more. The Lord is not through with Elijah. Elijah's ministry continues. Even when we are afraid, the Lord may have more work for us to do. If we are committed to God, we need to listen for God's voice in the wind and the fire and the earthquake and the sheer silence.

So, too, with the man whose name was Legion. When Jesus had commanded the demons to come out from him, and the man was now in his right mind, the man asked to go with Jesus. And Jesus said no; "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him." The parallel to our vision is clear: when God has done a good work in your life or through your faith, witness to the community your experience of God's love and mercy.

Finally, we end with Paul's letter to the Galatians. A clear and convincing statement of faith. God is the God of all creation. In God there is no longer Jew or Greek- or as we might say: there is no longer an "in" or an "out" group. We are all beloved children of God regardless of family

¹⁾ Kent L. Bohls, Pastor, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Austin, TX. www.communic@luthersem.edu June 21, 2013

background or financial condition or work experience. There is no longer slave or free: we are all loved by God regardless. There is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Our hymn 529, "In Christ there is no east or west" makes this point in words that predate our Civil Rights movement. The author, William Dunkerly who also wrote as John Oxenham, penned these lines based upon the Galatians text we read today.

In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord,
Close binding humankind.

Join hands, then, members of the faith,
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as His child
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,
In Him meet North and South;
All Christly souls are one in Him
Throughout the whole wide earth.

As we leave here today, remember the words of Jesus to the man named Legion: "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." Return to your home – and may your life evidence the vision of St. John's: "We are committed to God, to our church, and to each other as a family in Christ, providing and cherishing spiritual growth, and witnessing our faith to the community at large." *Amen.*