

Sermon for 2020-10-25

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father in Heaven. Amen!

Are you getting the impression that this could take a while to get through? You may now be asking the same question as me: How did I end up here? I'm not talking about being in Keene or even at Trinity Lutheran Church...I'm talking about how did I end up here, in front of all of you, having to deliver a sermon?!? Did I draw the short straw, lose at Rock-Paper-Scissors, or worst of all – miss an Elders meeting?

Normally, when the Elders fill in for Pastor Harkey, we still ask him to assist with the sermon preparation. However, with as crazy as his schedule has been during the pandemic, this time we wanted to give Pastor a true week off. I raised my hand at a recent Elders meeting when the need came up. What was I thinking? Can you imagine the pressure of coming up with an hour-long sermon without ever having done it before?!?

Might I embarrass myself in front of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? It certainly wouldn't be the first time! Would I get asked to turn in my Elders badge or maybe get impeached as Congregational

President? That would be one way of not having to attend all the meetings! Perhaps I should create a delay via a “technical difficulty” by turning off my mic and making it difficult to hear me? Maybe a modern solution: find an online sermon and then lip sync it?

After praying for a few weeks, my panic dwindled to a manageable level, and I began to assemble some ideas. The more I thought about it, I wondered if I might be able to rely on experience. Shouldn't I have retained some insights after hearing thousands of sermons over the course of my spiritual journey? Pastor Harkey has done this every week for over 30 years;

would God be willing to bless me with some similar divine inspiration at least once?

More importantly, what does my creative dilemma have to do with today's Gospel lesson?

Focusing on Matthew 22 verses 36 to 40. And Jesus replied to the lawyer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Wow! Jesus' brief response to the Pharisees packs an incredibly powerful message. But then again, don't all His words? Since I don't have any formal training beyond a layperson, how could I be expected to expound on His words – especially those words?!? There is no hidden meaning. No subtleties to discern. No twists, turns, or alternate interpretations to offer. The Truth, Jesus, speaks the truth! Consequently, one dilemma meets the other...how to fill the remaining 55 minutes when the message is so pure and direct?

Should I elaborate on the questions Jesus then asked the Pharisees? Verse 42, "What

do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” Then verses 45 and 46, “If David calls Him Lord, how is He his son? And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare ask Him any more questions.”

Unlike the Pharisees, we have the benefit of the entire Word – both Old and New Testaments – and therefore know the answers. In addition to that, we can go to our Heavenly Father in prayer at any time. As Philippians chapter 4, verse 6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” You’d better believe that

I've been relying on that passage during this sermon preparation!

Getting back to today's Gospel, when you really think about it, couldn't all our readings, teachings, and lessons boil down to those two commandments? If we followed the first, wouldn't the second flow effortlessly? With the Lord as the focus, wouldn't it be so easy to love our neighbors as ourselves? And how much nicer would that world be?

With 50 minutes still to go in this sermon, perhaps this is the message? October is Pastor Appreciation Month – and don't you

genuinely appreciate Pastor Harkey now?
Amen!

And from Philippians chapter 4, verse 7,
“May the peace of God, which surpasses all
understanding, guard your hearts and
minds in Christ Jesus.” Amen!