

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

And now it begins. Today is the first Sunday of the Time after Pentecost. The seasonal color is green and we will use it for the next nineteen Sundays. It is not until October 29th that we will set the green aside for two Sundays – the color red for Reformation Sunday and white for All Saints Sunday.

There are two other societal events going on right now. First is recognizing D-Day which occurred early this past week, and second, something which actually began prior to last Sunday which is the beginning of PRIDE month. Is there somehow a link between these two societal events? Something for us to ponder.

Once again, I want you to hear the Sundays and Seasons introduction for today. It says that Jesus was a devout Jew who practiced the faith but was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners, the religiously nonobservant. Jesus criticizes the self-righteous and reminds us that mercy is to be at the heart of our religious practices.

Our texts today can also be linked together by using three words; faith, mercy, and repent. First, faith is simply trust. It can be a form of trust in friends, ourselves, or even our government; but our most important trust is in God. In our reading from Romans, much like a similar reading in Hebrews, Abraham's faith is extolled as being Abraham's righteousness.

Second, mercy and love go hand in hand. Yet, verse 4 of our Hosea reading describes how fleeting human love and mercy are – like the early morning dew.

Third, our Hosea reading may also seem in its reference to repentance or acknowledgement of guilt like a short version of or at least very similar in tone to an oft quoted text from Second Chronicles that reads: "If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." I liked how Lori Bonkoski addressed this thought in her God Pause devotional on our Hosea reading this week. She said: "The Israelites get it: if they return to God, God will forgive them! This is part of what God promises to all of us. So why is it so hard? Why is it easier to turn away than to turn to God? Our human condition wants there to be some task, some deed, something we have to do to get on God's good side." In other words, it is all about us, we want to be involved, that is what we expect from others to us, so why would God not expect the same from us? And that my friends, at least for me, is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden. They could not just trust God, no they had to be involved and exercise their own freedom of choice. It is also our nature. Maybe it is how we are created in the image of God? I have not quite resolved that idea in my head. I am resolved, however, that our nature is to be involved, to require rules that we know we will break because we have freedom of choice.



I shared this meme on Facebook after it was shared by another of my retired pastor friends. It shows a person, most likely meant to be a Christian, protesting the Pride parade while what appears to be Jesus is walking to the Pride Month parade carrying a Pride flag. Jesus is also saying I will forgive you to the first person. As is often the case, this meme immediately drew several positive responses as well as a few negative responses especially from my one special friend of many years. The first written response by that friend was: “Calling attention to sin is what Jesus would do ~ not ignoring it like in the days of Noah and the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.” And, of course, the great Facebook debate was on, and still continues.

The problem for me with my friend’s comment is that it seems there are a whole lot of Christians who have this sentiment. And for the life of me, I just cannot figure out why. I seem to recall, in fact, that most of Jesus’ issues with the religious leaders of the day were because Jesus was conversant and friendly with and kind to all of the marginalized people Jesus met. Greg Carey in his commentary on our gospel reading today said it this way: “Jesus has harsh words to say in the First Gospel, but Jesus directs none of them at sinners.” If Jesus had this issue with the religious leaders of that day, one would think that religious leaders today might trod a different path. It appears that the sins of humans, especially many religious leaders, just like history, are doomed to repeat themselves.

Prince once said: “Most people don’t want to talk about politics and religion. They say, ‘let’s talk about something else.’” I suspect that most of you were taught like I was that those are not topics for polite conversation, which is an interesting way to say in light of how our

society interacts today. However, in our society today, politics and religion are inevitably linked. So since I shared a religious LGBTQIA+ graphic with you earlier, let me now share a political LGBTQIA+ graphic as well.



Hear then the good news - mostly according to the words of Martin Luther:

Martin Luther: “Certainly it is true that Christians, so far as they themselves are concerned, are subject neither to law nor sword, and have need of neither. But take heed and first fill the world with real Christians before you attempt to rule it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish; for the world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are all baptized and Christian in name.”

Martin Luther: “If thy brother be a sinner, conceal his sin, and pray for him to the lord, if thou reveal his sin and rejoice thereat, surely thou art not the child of the merciful father, for if thou were, thou wouldst be merciful according as God is.”

Martin Luther: “Judgment and condemnation is taken from us. Then thou must forgive thy neighbour if he hath committed anything against thee.”

Lori Bonkoski: “God's promise does not change; it is there for all of us, every day. In believing, we are gifted with that promise. Believe it!”

Lori Bonkoski: “God loves all people no matter who, what, or where we are in our lives. Thanks be to God!”

Chad Bird: “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. Let's make sure we are too.”

Jesus in Matthew 9:13: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Amen