

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Frank Crouch began his commentary on our Second reading today by saying: "In I Corinthians, Paul undertakes to address a series of church conflicts, theological debates, and disputes over community practices." Can anyone recall from last week's homily the one-word term I used to describe what Frank and Paul are talking about? Minutia!! God in Jesus identifies just two commandments that **I** summarize as "Love God" and "Love others." I think that is a pretty simple concept, albeit **not** easily done. All the **other** things, rules **and** traditions, that we as individuals and churches as institutions use to beat up or split apart the body of believers **is** minutia. This is **exactly** the issue Jesus had with the Pharisees and the Scribes.

Christopher Hays in his commentary on our Isaiah reading said, "the biblical witness is that from age to age, God **hears** the cries of God's people and **empowers** them – in exhaustion, in oppression, and in other moments of greatest need." This concept is similar to a phrase I also used many times last week - God is here.

The following story is one that I wanted to use in the newsletter this month but I could not find it at the time, so I kind of paraphrased it in the newsletter. The story was published by the site Sundries which always has lots of **quotes** from Martin Luther and **other** Lutheran theologians like Dietrick Bonhoeffer.

The story goes this way: "In the 6th grade at grammar school in a small town in Eastern Germany, in the very last exam in a religion class, I asked what the role of the church was. What would you have answered...?? – One pupil answered, for example: "the church should teach people to believe in God...", another student wrote: "the task of the church is to overcome boundaries...", but the following answer from a student **really** impressed me and made **me** think, (and no, I didn't exactly teach the pupils these answers, and also no, the pupil had no church background at all!) This particular pupil said, "the church has the following tasks: to make people aware of God's desire for them! To make space (or room) for people and to give people a place where they can entrust themselves to God, And to give Christians a place to gather, and meet with each other, and to meet with God." This story was accompanied by a Dietrick Bonhoeffer quote from his book Letters and Papers from Prison, it said: "*The Church is the Church only **when it exists for others ... not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.***"

So, as we now turn to our gospel reading, Karoline Lewis in her commentary imagines what Simon's mother-in-law first thought when she realized she was healed – "What am I doing here?" Do we not find ourselves in situations where we ask the same or similar questions? Why am I here? What am I doing? What is my purpose? What does God want me to do? These are individual, familial and corporate questions often repeated at various times throughout our lives and history. These are, in fact, the real questions the Transition Team is tasked with answering on your behalf for **this** worship community known as KLC. Why are we here? What have we done? What are we doing? And what are we to do? So, KLC people, members, non-members, everyone – mull these questions over and provide ideas to the Transition Team which, by the way, you soon will have an unexpected opportunity to do today.

David Lose suggests in his commentary on our gospel lesson that our homilies and worship should **create** a sense of possibility, potential, freedom, and empowerment. And one verse from our reading today provides us insight into how to do this. Verse 35 says: "**In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.**" This is important. If we take time to focus on God, then God has more time to focus on us.

Hear then the good news:

Renewal begins with conversation, prayer, and service.

Repentance begins with conversation, prayer, and service.

Revival begins with conversation, prayer, and service.

We know what Simon's mother-in-law did after she was healed. She served.

Do we have any idea what the man with the unclean spirits from last week did after he was healed? Not really but I bet he also served in some way.

You see, God wants to set all of us free to live **into** our God-given identity and potential.

Yes, Jesus **frees** us from the things that seek to **oppress** us like despair, fear, insecurity, loss, and so on.

But Jesus also **frees** us for our **life** of purpose, meaning, and good works **which** is service to others.

Our good works do not, cannot justify us before God.

Our good works are our response to the Gospel, the Good News, to God by serving our neighbors with love, joy, and freedom.

Pastor Frederick Buechner once said: "*The place God calls us to is the place where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*"

That, my friends, is why I am **here**.

Now you have to determine what God wants you, both as individuals and as the community of KLC, to do at this time, in this place.

Grace and peace to you my friends. God is hearing and leading.

Amen