Sermon Preached at First Lutheran Blasdell for their 100th Anniversary

Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

Pray…

Just this morning for the first time ever, my son who is 2 said, “I love you.” Kid’s can say things that stop you in your tracks. Sometimes with their silliness and sometimes with how profound their words are. My daughter is four she had her first day of school this past week. We are waiting for the doors to open and she is holding my hand as she looks up into my eyes and say’s “Daddy, I feel nervous and excited. I will be brave.” Can you tell her mom is a psychologist? Or the other day when she wanted to play driver and got in the front seat of the car and began to pretend. The first thing she did as began to drive, yell “Jesus.” Was she imitating one of her parents and praying or was she imitating the other and swearing. I’ll let your imagination decide which parent is more likely to do which. Most relevant to today’s Gospel, I was driving and I said “Ugh, I hate traffic.” To which a small voice from the back said, “Daddy, we shouldn’t use the word hate.”

 She can be bold and precocious so I wonder if my daughter would have called out Jesus for using the word hate. Without question Jesus teachings this morning might also stop us in our tracks. Hate your family, be crucified/carry that cross, sell your possessions. Nice warm and fuzzy comforting reading for a grand celebration like a 100th anniversary. Now I could try to explain to her that Jesus tells us to love our enemies, love our neighbors, and certainly other scripture tells us to honor parents, so perhaps Jesus is being bold and over the top in his preaching. This is a way to get folks attention, to stop us in our tracks, and really think about what it costs to follow the way. His way of sacrificial and self-giving love. I could attempt to make his words easier to swallow by saying, think not so much Hate like how I feel about the Kansas City Chiefs and more love less. That Jesus and his call to follow must always come first.

I think she still would want Jesus to use a different word. We might want Jesus to have used different words. This is after all the Savior who just a few weeks ago said he has come not to bring peace but division. We just might feel as though there is enough hate and enough division in this world already. But here is why this is in fact a great teaching for a 100th anniversary. I believe we are being invited to consider the costs, the sacrifices, and the risks of discipleship. I am sure there were countless in the last 100 years of discipleship in this community. Jesus words encourage us to pause, wonder and prayerfully consider are we ready and willing for the next 100? What within us and within this community is a barrier to sharing the Good News of Jesus life, death, and resurrection? What do we value the most? What allegiances, loyalties might need to be let go, changed, in order to more fully follow Jesus?

This is the only time the word cost is mentioned in the entire New Testament so some preachers will take a few moments to mention Pastor Bonhoffer who gave his life in working against Nazi’s during world war II. Or we could talk about one of the ELCA’s newest congregations, Ninevah Lutheran Justice Ministry. Which is located in the mountains of Virgina. When Christ Lutheran in Radford no longer could continue their ministry not sue to finances but people power, they gave their building and endowment to start a brand new congregation. This congregation is named Ninevah whose ministry focuses on outreach to folks experiencing homelessness, dealing with religious trauma, and harassment due to their LGBTQ+ Identity. Two extreme examples of faithfulness to Gospel, Loyalty to Jesus over preserving self and self-interests.

However, what I really want to talk about this morning are the Savanah Bananas… Raise your hand if you have heard of the Savanah Bananas? The easiest way to explain them is Harlem Globetrotters but baseball. Trick plays, choreographed dances, If a fan catches a foul ball it’s an out, instead of cheerleaders you have elderly women as the dancing nanas, the games have a running clock and are played at a fast pace. All tickets and merch kept at a reasonable price, concerts before and after. The critics will say but it’s not true baseball, but they are now not just selling out minor league stadiums, nor even major league stadiums, but this year they are now selling out football stadiums filled with fans excited to watch and participate in Banana Ball.

What you might not know is that the dream started when owner and founder Jesse Cole and his wife bought a run-down minor league team by mortgaging their house. Their guiding principle, what if we put fans first? They do not ask how can we make more money? They don’t wonder but what does baseball tradition say we should do? Again and again their refrain, what is better for the fans?

Church we are not in the entertainment business, we aren’t called to success or to have any fans in these stands. Jesus gave us our mission clearly in the great commission to go make disciples baptizing them in the name of the father son and holy spirit. As we give thanks to God for the last 100 years I invite us this morning to dream about the next 100. What will be our guiding principle? What refrain will be the drumbeat that drives the marching of this community? Will it be tradition? Will it be survival? Or will the radical love of Jesus stirring in our hearts to let our light shine?

We have been called and given new life in the waters of Baptism. My hope is every time we gather together, we are once again stopped in our tracks. Not by the cute words of a child, nor even the words of a preacher, but by the word made flesh Who has proclaimed a way of radical love, grace, and forgiveness. The one who showed us the way when he did not stop in his tracks on his journey to the cross. We give thanks to the Creator that Frist has been making the proclamation for 100 years, you are loved by God. *Amen.*