

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

June 18, 2023

The Way

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Sisters and brothers, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A month or two ago I included a Star Wars quote in my sermon, one from Yoda if you recall. So yes, for those of you who are fans of Star Wars, my sermon title is another Star Wars reference. If you aren't a Star Wars fan, why not? Just kidding! I know it's not everyone's cup of tea. But if you don't get the reference, there is a recent TV series set in the Star Wars universe that focuses on a group of refugees known as Mandalorians. The Empire destroyed their planet and now they are homeless in the galaxy.

As is often the case, small communities that are targeted by others will often respond in one of two ways, assimilation, or an almost militant adherence to their culture and traditions. The Mandalorians who fall into the latter category hold strictly to their code of honor, known as the "Way." In the TV series you will hear these members affirm one another by saying "This is the Way."

Eventually members of both groups, those who assimilated and those who didn't, join forces to reclaim their home planet. The story telling makes it clear in these interactions that those who assimilated are some-what jealous of those who did not. There seems to be a yearning for...something...in those that left the Way.

Enough Star Wars for a bit, but don't worry, we'll get back to them. Along with knowing I am a Star Wars nerd, by this time you will have also learned that I generally don't use the term Christian when I preach. Rather, I prefer the moniker "Followers of the Way of Christ" or slightly more succinctly, "Followers of the Way." I prefer this language in part because it is what the first believers referred to themselves as, but also because over the last two millennia the term "Christian" has acquired a LOT of baggage. Baggage that I believe is very detrimental to the work of the faithful.

You've heard me address that baggage before, I won't get into it too much right now. But I can largely sum up that baggage in two words: judgementalism and hypocrisy. For many in the world today that is what a Christian is...someone who will judge others while feeling they are especially holy and righteous, completely ignoring how they fail to follow the Way.

Now, if I prefer the language of "Followers of the Way of Christ," then I likely need to define what that Way looks like, don't I? That is at the same time incredibly simple and incredibly difficult. Following the Way of Christ simply means loving God with our whole being and loving one another as we wish to be loved...which I understand to mean being accepted, valued, and included simply for who we are.

Simple to say, very difficult to live out. And we can see this Way laid out clearly in the mission given to the disciples in our text today. The twelve are given the power and charge to "proclaim the good news"¹ and to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."² All of these actions are oriented towards loving neighbors and restoring them to wholeness. These actions also serve to show love for God through the love shown to God's creation.

Nowhere in the instructions are judgement or hypocrisy. The closest might be that reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in 10:15. That reference should be no surprise though, as it comes in relation to being denied hospitality, which was the great sin of those cities (Genesis 18 and 19 are meant to be a contrast between Abraham's extravagant hospitality to the angels and Sodom's breaking of hospitality laws). In essence, Jesus is teaching that if any reject the disciples they will simply suffer the consequences of their own actions...which I argue is always what happens with regards to sin. Sin always leads, quite naturally, to negative consequences. So Jesus instructs his disciples to simply move on if they're rejected.

While there is no judgement or hypocrisy in Christ's instructions there are words of warning. The Way of Christ is a Way that will be opposed by the world. And following the Way can lead to pain and conflict. No great surprise there as those who benefit from the oppression of others will always oppose those who speak out against such oppression. Those who benefit from the current systems of control will always oppose efforts to reform those systems.

¹ Matthew 10:7a (NRSVUE)

² Matthew 10:8a

And, we can't overestimate the power of the status quo. Inertia and apathy are tools the world uses to oppose Christ's Way too.

Go out into the world and be agents of love, Christ teaches. And understand that the world will not love you back...at least not at first. But keep working, for "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few!"³ What an observation! The harvest is plentiful! There are so many in this world that yearn for what God has to offer...wholeness...love...grace...salvation...life. The Holy Spirit has been at work and has made the fields ripe and abundant...but the laborers are few!

The call is clear...get to work! Go out into the fields and harvest the fruits of the Spirit's work. Share the good news of God's love for all and provide what the world so yearns for, yet so misunderstands! The same thing those assimilated Mandalorians yearned for...identity, purpose, meaning. That is what we have that get to offer the world...a better, healthier, more whole, more human Way. A way that offers hope and connection, love and community. A Way...THE Way that we were created for.

In many ways, Followers of the Way of Christ, are outsiders and aliens in the world. We are refugees from the baggage of Christianity. We flee the evil of self-centeredness and self-idolatry, but we don't always get it right. And so we look for fellow laborers, fellow followers of the Way. We too can either assimilate to the world's ways or hold fast to the Way of Christ.

I know which I want to choose! I also know how badly I will fail to follow. And so I need you, my fellow laborers, my fellow followers. I need you to correct me when I'm wrong and encourage me when I'm down. I need you to affirm me when I'm on the Way and guide me when I wander off of it. For this too is the Way...a communal Way. The harvest is plentiful, around us and in us. Let's be about our work! The work of the Way! Amen.

³ Matthew 9:37b