

“The righteous are not afraid of evil doings;  
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.” AMEN!

Since last week’s worship, I  
have been thinking a lot about pretending.

If you recall, I talked to the kids about  
the way I “pretended” to be a hotel and  
restaurant manager.

I wore the right clothes, received the degree.

You know the rest.

The charade that I presented  
was a success, I guess.

It provided income.

I climbed the so- called “ladder” and  
moved up in the corporation, but as my career  
went like this (point up)...  
my joy went like that (point down).

There was internal conflict that affected me  
on the inside and on the outside,  
relationships were strained and there were  
the internal feelings of gloom and  
the external disguises  
began to fall apart.

The truth needed to come out  
and thank God, it did. (Pause)

This desire to pretend is still tempting.

For instance, this time of year in  
the life of an ELCA pastor, is the time when  
we fill out paperwork for the synod office.

We summarize the past year's  
accomplishments and challenges;  
the joys and sorrows.

We speak about goals for the coming year and  
for ways the synod office can help us  
to achieve the goals.

And, to be honest, it is a time when  
it is very tempting to put on a charade of success. (Pause)

Well, no longer.

Maybe it is because I've been doing  
this "pastor-playing" for like  
almost 12 years now;

maybe it is because of the death of my father  
and the experiences we all have  
when someone you love dies;  
maybe it is because of my confidence in

this congregation and my

knowledge that those who are here and  
those who watch have my back;  
maybe it is one of these or all of these.

But, at this point in my life, it is becoming  
necessary to no longer pretend.

You too have permission to be real. (Pause)

This is what Jesus talked about in our  
section of gospel today.

It comes from his sermon on the mount.

In verses 13 and 14, he said,  
“You are the salt of the earth;  
You are the light of the world.”

We must be reminded that Jesus wasn't only  
talking to one person here.

It was the plural “you.”

The “all of you all” are  
the salt of the earth;

the “all of you all” are  
the light of the world.

Jesus spoke the words to the multitudes  
at the Sermon on the Mount and speaks  
the same words to the community of  
St. Stephen.

“All of you all are salt of the earth and  
lights of the world.

We are not perfect.

Sometimes we don't put enough salt in or  
we get burned by the fire  
under the bushel basket.

Too much salt ruins a dish, but  
when it comes to being “real”  
we have something, here, that is important  
and it has something to do with persistence.

(Pause)

Now, I want to be careful because what  
I mean by persistence is not to encourage us  
to work harder or to do more...

Some of you, already, do more than you should.

The persistence I speak about is  
the vision of participation we have with  
God's activity in the world. (Pause)

Some of us want to question Jesus and say,

“You don’t mean me, do you?”

Yes, all of you all means all of us.

And some of the texts today, especially in Isaiah,  
sound like criticisms God had about worship rituals.

Still, we know the rituals of worship  
have meaning and purpose.

But what is really being taught here is that  
the persistence of righteousness is  
an essential element of God’s character. (2X)

“Righteousness” meaning justice with  
fairness as emphasis.

The prophet Isaiah’s words were part of  
the journey of God’s people, in the same way  
that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians, are  
a part of the early church’s journey and

the way that Matthew’s gospel is communicating  
the same legacies on and in “all of you all.”

Today, through the work of the Spirit,  
we hear Jesus’ vision for a society and  
we can identify our place in that vision.

We are called to be different.

We are called to be a different

kind of community.

One that is unlike any other.

One that is distinct, sacrificial, and diverse.

Today, we hear Jesus’  
“I have a Dream” speech.

Where all people have rights and dignity  
in their own personhood.

That “we refuse to believe that the bank of justice”  
and righteousness “is bankrupt.”

That we recognize, and speak aloud,  
the light of Christ in one another... no matter  
the color of a person’s skin or gender  
or economic status.

That we behave as though “justice is  
a reality for all of God’s children.”

And that we, a predominantly white congregation,  
“realize that our destiny is tied up with their destiny.”

That our persistence is to stand with others,  
partnering a peace that can never  
“be satisfied as long as people of different  
skin color receive unspeakable horrors  
of police brutality.” (Pause)

The high bar of righteousness that  
we read in verse 20, is God's embodiment  
of righteousness in Jesus and Jesus now  
wants to see righteousness  
(that is, God's power at work in  
the world) lived out in all of  
you all and in me.

Jesus' vision can be the way we participate in  
God's activity in the world, right now.

This communal call from Jesus is an invitation  
to action to a community for the sake of  
a community.

We shall not put on the shirt of silence nor  
the hat of despair nor  
the cloak of apathy.

No more pretending that this is someone else's struggle.

It means we show up and stand against segregation  
and be tuned to listen for the power of God  
at work in the world leading all people  
to be "free at last."

AMEN!

Quotes taken from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" Speech.