

“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

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.