

Readings and Sermon July 7, 2024

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone

“Healing differences & casting out contempt.”



When Jesus and his disciples knocked on doors to share God’s word and relieve suffering, they weren’t always welcome. People didn’t always agree with the teachings Jesus shared, and, like any disagreement, things could get heated. People resisted. Showed them contempt. So what did Jesus tell them to do in those situations?

Gospel: Mark 6:1-13

[Jesus] came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He

ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Psalm 123

To you I lift up my eyes, to you enthroned in the heavens.

As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,
and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to you, O LORD our God, until you show us your mercy. Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy,
for we have had more than enough of contempt,
too much of the scorn of the indolent rich,
and of the derision of the proud.

Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone

“Healing differences & casting out contempt.”

“We have had more than enough of contempt.”

That is the lament of God’s people Israel we heard in today’s psalm. We have had more than enough of contempt. Enough of the scorn of those who live lives of ease, while we scramble and scrape by. Enough of the rich looking down upon us, calling us impoverished, less-than, insignificant.

This psalm probably comes to us from that time after God’s people returned from decades of exile in Babylon. They rebuilt the temple. They rebuilt Jerusalem, or maybe they were in the midst of the rebuilding project. It was a time of great

expectations - and a lot of unmet expectations. Returning, it turns out, was hard work. The last thing the people needed was the contempt of their neighbors.

We have had more than enough of contempt. Maybe that's your prayer of lament, too. We live in a much different time, under much different circumstances. But we also know what it feels like to live in a society where contempt pollutes the air around us, threatening to get into our lungs, threatening to damage our hearts.

Contempt gets broadcast over cable TV news and through social media. Contempt is planted in yards on signs with all-caps expletives. Maybe contempt stirs within us when someone mentions a particular political candidate or party or hot-button issue. To be sure, political discourse is critical to the functioning of a democracy. It's critical to sustain the freedom our nation just celebrated.

But the mocking and truth-twisting and name-calling? Many of us have had more than enough of that kind of contempt. And still, that contempt can tempt us. Maybe you have been tempted to join in the slander and scorning because that's what your friends are doing. Or maybe you have been tempted to retreat in hopelessness. Today, I hear Jesus sending us out. Sending us out into a culture of contempt with the power to bless, heal, and offer hope.

Just like he sent those twelve disciples. Those twelve disciples have just seen what contempt looks like up close. Jesus preached a powerful message in his hometown. All the neighbors said so. That is, until they thought some more about just who this preacher was. He grew up in this backwater town, same as they did. Does he think he's smarter than them? More important? He's a carpenter, for goodness' sake, running around with disciples who call him teacher. Maybe this hometown kid had gotten a little too full of himself.

After seeing Jesus get mocked and rejected like that, I might ask him for a little more training before we move on to the sending out part. And I'd want to go out

armed with every comeback and counter-argument and Bible commentary I could fit in my brain and my backpack.

THAT'S how you go out into a culture of contempt: ready to defend and convince and convert. But that's NOT how Jesus sends out the disciples. Don't take anything, he says. Nothing but a staff and the clothes on your backs. These disciples will be vulnerable. They will have to rely on the hospitality of strangers. They will have to eat what is placed in front of them. And what if they are rejected?

In a culture of contempt, we might dig into the past of our opponents and post something nasty about them online. We might badmouth them to their neighbors. We might condemn them or threaten God's judgment. OR we might try harder to convince them that we are right. We might forward them some more emails and links to news articles. We might figure out ways to legislate the way of Jesus, you know, for the good of those who just don't get it.

But that doesn't seem to be Jesus' way, either. If people reject you, Jesus says, shake the dust off your feet and go. Don't force my way upon those who are not willing or not ready. Just leave. Step out in faith in the direction of the next town over.

Why would Jesus say this? It sounds like admitting defeat - and that's something we don't do in a culture of contempt. Well, Jesus can say this, because he is clear on his mission - the mission for which he is preparing these disciples - and it is not a mission of conversion or control.

Jesus sends his disciples on a mission of blessing and healing. He sends them to cast out unclean spirits and proclaim repentance. And repentance doesn't mean confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness. It means changing your heart and

your life, to get ready for what God is doing. And what God is doing has never been about control or conversion. It's about blessing and healing.

Jesus still sends his disciples out on his mission of blessing and healing. Jesus sent those first disciples to cast out the unclean spirits threatening their neighbors' well-being. In this story, we don't get details about what those spirits looked like or how they acted. Maybe that's because Jesus knows that every generation encounters particular varieties of unrelenting, unclean spirits.

Maybe contempt is one of the unclean spirits threatening our neighbors' well-being. Maybe contempt is an unclean spirit that we have been empowered to cast out. How, you might ask? The same as those first disciples. Starting with a willingness to be vulnerable.

A willingness to rely on the hospitality of strangers - or those people well-known to us whose beliefs and values we find strange. To spend time with them. To eat with them. To listen to them.

Maybe casting out a spirit of contempt starts with sitting down for a meal and daring to linger in those taboo conversation topics. Maybe casting out a spirit of contempt continues with just a few simple words, words like: "Tell me why you think that." Casting out a spirit of contempt is not about making people understand what we already know. It's about seeking to understand what other people know.

"We have to be willing to sit next to people who see the world differently from us, to listen as they explain the world. It is only together that we can make a difference." Those are the words of preacher and professor Joy J. Moore, in a workshop she called "Leading in an Age of Contempt."

"We have to be willing to sit next to people who see the world differently from us, to listen as they explain the world. It is only together that we can make a

difference.” That may sound a little risky to you. It does to me. It probably did to those first disciples, too.

But Jesus sends us out into a culture of contempt because he knows his followers have something to offer the world: a better way. A way of love. A way of blessing and hope. A way out of the contempt that divides us.

Jesus came to break down the walls that divide us: Jew and Greek, male and female, liberal and conservative, urban and suburban and rural. And Jesus empowers his followers to heal divisions and to cast out those spirits of contempt that threaten our well-being and the well-being of our neighbors.

Contempt may seem like a formidable demon. But Jesus knows it can be cast out - cast out by faithful disciples sent out into the world with little more than a blessing, and backed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone

Presented July 7, 2024 at Bethel Lutheran Church in Muskego, WI USA

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