

Sunday, October 3, 2021

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Grace Lutheran Church, Hatfield, WI

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Human beings were created to be in community. God laid it all out in beginning, as we heard from Genesis: "It is not good that the man should be alone."

But when a nation, or community, or church, or family is ripped apart, scars can last. During our years in the Deep South I learned that the pain of the Civil War is still very much alive. They refer to it "the War of Northern Aggression." More than once I got called a "_____ Yankee." But I'm from California," I tried to explain. No good.

Social scientists have been saying that we are in the second most deeply divided time in our nation's history. We are in the midst of a new kind of civil war, one that is gouging fabric of our society more deeply with every passing week. Did you read that federal help is now being sought by some school boards because of the dangerously contentious atmosphere meeting have taken on? Members are resigning in fear for their lives. One former school board member in Nevada wrote in the local paper that had walked into every meeting terrified for his safety, not knowing what might happen next. "At one point, I didn't want to leave my house anymore," he said. "I was constantly looking over my shoulder. The anticipation alone of attending another board meeting, being in the same room with folks who likely would be happy if I dropped dead, triggered severe emotional responses for me."

It seems we have largely lost the common ground in which real dialogue can take place. Fear is now sitting in driver's seat, securely belted in. Words that used to unite us like patriot, freedom, and liberty often now signify the opposite: Partisan. Exclusion. Oppression. The founding spirit of our nation is being submerged by tidal waves of self-centered angst. And people with means to make a difference have burrowed into self-contained lives of children and sports and extra-curricular activities, presumably so these children can get into a good college and go on to lead their own prosperous lives dedicated their children and sports and extra-curricular activities.

My father, Charlie Miller, was no saint, but he was representative of a better age. Maybe they were the "Greatest Generation." His entire life was devoted to others, almost to a fault. As a community college history teacher, he got to school at 4 every morning to make sure he had everything in place to captivate his classes all day long with true stories that were wilder and crazier than anything you could make up.

He managed local political campaign after campaign, every single one of which was a loser, but that never stopped him from taking on the next one. As soon as he retired he took over the local chapter of Volunteer Vital English and the presidency of the library board. Out to dinner with whoever, he always grabbed the check even though my parents didn't really have the money to do that. I do not remember ever seeing him just sitting in front of the TV. His entire life was given over to trying to make his corner of the world a better place for human beings to live in.

Church played no role in his life, but something drove him forward, I'm not sure what -- a vision, a conviction, a hope. Maybe a belief in the essential goodness of humankind.

But the writer of Hebrews is pleading with us today to see that humanity does have a common ground. Just listen to the opening verse of the letter, pure music:

*In many and various ways God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets of old,
but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son.*

The author is begging us to listen because these are the last days--those after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and before he comes again in his glory to gather all things to himself. We don't get another set of last days. These are them. People of God, it is up to us to get it together and remember, quoting Hebrews, that it is Jesus "whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word."

If we truly believe that Christ came for all, then Jesus must be the center of the hurricane that is battering our foundations. Jesus is "home" on our GPS. Hebrews 2:1 says, "Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it." We **MUST** give Jesus our full attention.

This is especially critical in a time where we find ourselves harangued by politicians, pundits, and posts on social media to 'pay attention' to so much else that is far less important and most of which is driven by personal agendas. So let's ask:

- In whatever situation we find ourselves, are we prioritizing our words or actions in a way that puts Christ as the center?
- Are we thinking of Jesus enough—remembering what he did for us--such that we will boldly speak and do whatever aligns with him, without fear of condemnation?
- Do we stand against the injustice of Jesus' own death at the hands of an oppressive regime just as we stand against the injustice that we see around us, in the conviction that God is a God of justice and transformation who has called us to carry out that work of the kingdom?
- Do we accept that Christ's broken body mirrors our own--so that when we are lost in heartache, or grief, or despair, we remember to turn to him to gather up our fragments into his arms?
- And do we believe the promise that is ours in his resurrection, that life, not death, always has the last word?

If your answer to even one of these can be "Yes," that single word ejects fear from the driver's seat and sets your course, your GPS, on Christ.

Amen.