

Sermon – Pentecost Sunday – St Mary’s Lake Ronkonkoma

John 20: 19-23

In last Friday’s NY Times, David Brooks wrote an opinion piece responding to the President’s decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Accord. In the opening paragraph he quoted part of a statement made earlier to the Washington Post by two cabinet members referring to the Presidents recent foreign trip. They stated “The President embarked on his first foreign trip with a clear eyed outlook that the world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and business engage and compete for advantage.”

Brooks concluded that the statement “asserts that selfishness is the sole driver of human affairs. It grows out of a worldview that life is a competitive struggle for gain. It implies that cooperative communities are hypocritical covers for the selfish jockeying underneath.”

The statement quoted from the government leaders made me angry but I know from my life experience that their statement rings true for much of the world. However as a follower of Jesus Christ these sentiments are the antithesis of Jesus’ teachings and the Jesus movement.

For much of human history, if not all of human history, the world has operated as these gentleman assert. In our early years we’d fight each other with clubs for food and territory. Later on kingdoms would conquer kingdoms to gain territory and valued possessions. The Hebrew bible is full of stories of nations and tribes competing for advantage one over another.

In the engagement of people and nations in the competitive struggle there are inevitably winners and losers. A conquering nation will often drive out the losers to take possession of their land for themselves or enslave them as cheap labor. There are numerous examples in the word today of one ethnic or religious group rising up to conquer others, and to drive them out. We might call this ethnic cleansing, terrorism or just people engaging in the arena for competing advantage. The statement taken to its logical conclusion is frightening to me because it means the strong and selfish prevail over the weak and disadvantaged, and it means this behavior is sanctioned by our national leaders.

The well-known philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was also a believer in this type of worldview. He reacted against the spread of Christian belief and detested the ethic of affirming the worth and dignity of every person, no matter how lowly. Nietzsche held to the pagan virtues that people must be willing to sacrifice human lives that stand in the way of human endeavor. He agreed with sweeping aside the weak that were unable to contribute to creating new traditions, institutions or to wage war.

This tribal view of life is exactly what the prophets and Jesus spoke against. As Jesus followers we too have to stand up and speak against selfish ambition that disregards the

weak and devalues those that hold the view that working for the common good is a benefit to all.

Competition for advantage, no matter whether it is global or local, displaces people and scatters them to the wind like chaff. The world's refugee crisis is a result of this philosophy of selfish endeavor. The famine and violence in some African countries is largely as a result of ethnic struggles to control state resources with elite dictators and their families hoarding wealth. I could go on and on but I hope you get the picture and understand the devastating consequences of selfish endeavor. We have work to do as Jesus followers to be an antidote to this worldview and we need an advocate and a guide for the way.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, the day when God sent the Holy Spirit to be with all people with open hearts. Today also marks the start of the second half of the liturgical year when we are reminded how the first Jesus followers came together to form communities of faith and wrestled with a new way of being in the world. It is a wrestling that is also manifest in our lives as we too come together as a community of faith in a world of selfish endeavor.

Pentecost marks the arrival of the winds of change that brought the Holy Spirit to all the nations. The disciples had once again gathered together in one place when suddenly from heaven came a great sound like the rush of a violent wind. The sound was so loud the whole city of Jerusalem heard it. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit in a way that was different to when Jesus breathed on them when he appeared to them after his resurrection. This time the disciples could speak in languages unknown to them before. It allowed them to be understood by the many foreigners residing in Jerusalem.

The events of that morning all those years ago split the crowd between those with curious minds and those with skeptical minds. Peter rose to address the crowd and to correct their assertion that the disciples were drunk. He reminded them that the prophet Joel, who they should have been aware of, had predicted this day when God would pour out the Spirit upon all flesh and that each would prophesy. No one was to miss out and even the slaves and women, considered non-persons were to be beneficiaries of God's saving grace in sending the Holy Spirit for all.

God's plan for the salvation of the world required that Jesus message of justice, love and hope had to be taken out to the world. The disciples not only needed the skill of linguistics but also need an advocate and a guide to reside within them as they faced up to the difficult work that lay ahead. God's plan and now the mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God through Jesus Christ. It started on that morning and we now carry on this mission to grow the body of Christ.

The life and death of Jesus was a pivot point in human history and the beginning of the end times. Jesus was the antithesis of the pagan view of life and someone who challenged the prevailing worldview centered on selfish endeavor. He sought to form communities of faith centered on the primary commandment to love our neighbors. Jesus called his 12

apostles together to form the first community and they traversed the country preaching the good news and attracting thousands of followers who came to see the power of his message and to repudiate the prevailing power structures of their time. Jesus' ministry was all about challenging power structures and seeing, touching and communing with the powerless – women, foreigners and refugees, the sick, the disabled, the lepers and slaves. He went out of his way to listen to them and restore them to wholeness and dignity.

The Holy Spirit that came upon those folks all those years ago comes upon us now at our baptisms. The Holy Spirit is sealed within us at that sacramental and holy moment and we are initiated into the community of the body of Christ. Together we magnify the Holy Spirit in the community and the world.

The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthian community reminds them that the Holy Spirit was given to them to activate their individual gifts for the common good. We each have gifts to share no matter who we are at any one time in our lives. We are all baptized into the one body and we are all made to drink of the one spirit.

The Holy Spirit binds us together in community and becomes for us our advocate and guide, a comforter for the difficult way of life. The spirit of God continues to pour out in the world. As we live and work and worship together we do it for the common good. This sentiment has to extend to the global community so that the common good is for all. Lifting communities out of poverty both here and overseas is for the common good. Feeding everyone and ensuring communities have clean water to drink is for the common good. Ending racist behavior and violence, and caring for displaced persons whether here or overseas is for the common good of humanity.

The common good is our Christian ethic and the Holy Spirit empowers us to constantly work toward making a better world for all, not just some. Let us not succumb to selfish endeavor and competition so we are the greatest when so many others get discarded and trampled on. Jesus showed us how to live and how to care for each other in community, especially the weak and the displaced.

The other way leads only to destruction.