

DIACONAL SUNDAY

February 23, 2014

Celebrating witness expressed through service (diakonia) and leadership offered by the ELCIC's diaconal ministers.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. —Matthew 5:44

Reflections on the Lectionary for Epiphany 7

February 23, 2014

Lessons:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

Psalm 119:33-40

I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

God calls all of us to diakonia. . .from Leviticus to Jesus to Paul. We are to minister to the poor, to care for the hungry, to become advocates for those who are not being treated justly. Jesus knelt before his disciples in the Upper Room, washed their feet and said: “Do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Jesus showed us how to do diakonia by the way he lived: challenge unjust authorities, feed the hungry, care for the sick and dying, comfort the grieving. That is what our call into diakonia is—a word often translated as service or outreach.

We say that it takes a village to raise a child; likewise, it takes a community to act diaconally. Individual drops in the ocean are necessary. And by working together we can create a tempest. Do you have the courage and impelling desire? That's what it takes to pour out precious time and resources to search out information, choose what to do and then do it. Of course we want to fulfil Jesus' command to “do it!”, and too often we don't know how, so we don't begin. God calls us beyond the boundaries of the familiar, of conformity, so we need each other to have the courage, persistence and freedom to accomplish difficult tasks.

I found that the Old Testament and Psalm are most clearly focused on diakonia. The phrase in Leviticus “I am God” provides a wonderful stance from which to view diakonia—God is deeply involved in our day to day activities. The command in Leviticus is to be a “holy people;” this holiness includes generosity, honesty and fair judgements. I would describe this as



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having a “diaconal spirit.” Our witness has greater meaning for people when we embody diakonia in how we move and live as church.

Paul in Corinthians comes to the statement that we are God’s temple, which is holy. If that is so, then caring for those in need is a God-given imperative. Emphasis: God’s Spirit dwells within each of us, thus acting diaconally is natural, if we open ourselves to it.

The Gospel reading is a little more difficult. While it focuses on loving one’s enemies, and not accepting “an eye for an eye” philosophy, one could easily use these words to help listeners know that caring for others does not mean only caring for those who “deserve” our caring! God makes the sun “rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”. So are we to act.

It may even be dangerous to make diakonia the focus of our lives. It was for Jesus and it was for Stephen, one of the first to be named a deacon. (Acts 6-8) Stephen was also the first recorded martyr. Diakonia has never been popular, perhaps because being a servant does not connote power, prestige or wealth. Servanthood was Jesus’ way of life. It is God’s command, clearly part of God’s plan for our lives from earliest times.

I believe that the ELCIC Diaconal Ministry Roster has been given to us for a purpose. We give thanks to God that our church recognizes the need for theologically and professionally trained men and women, called by God to provide leadership and assistance to help us answer the call to diakonia. Our vision is to be a vibrant church, growing in faith and good works. In the midst of this transformative time, we need leadership from pastors, diaconal ministers, lay leaders, and from congregations, small and large.

God calls us all to the ministry of diakonia. When serving each other in community, we also feel the love of God in our deepest selves. Praise God for the trust God has in us to be God’s hands and feet in this world.

—Reflections on the Lectionary prepared by Sister Anne Keffer



Study Notes

Horizontal lines for writing study notes.