



Mount Carmel Lutheran Church

Minneapolis Area Synod Gathering

Sermon by Pr. Kelly Chatman

Advisor to the Bishop in the Mpls Area Synod

on Matthew 11:16-30 (Romans 7:16-30)

on Sunday, July 5, 2020 (5th Sunday of Pentecost)

Grace, peace, and mercy from God, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Good morning. I want to begin with a thank you to Bishop Svennungsen for this opportunity to serve as your preacher this morning. I recently retired from my congregation (Redeemer Lutheran Church in North Minneapolis) back in February, just one week before the coronavirus. I hadn't really preached very much since that time. I think about how when the bishop was deciding who among the many wonderful preachers she has on staff who she might have preach for today, she looked down the synod deep bench of preachers and saw me sitting at the end of the bench, and I got the call. It's like the bishop was that coach who looked down at the end of the bench and said, "Chatman, you're in." Thank you, Bishop Ann.

Thank you faithful people of the Minneapolis Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These are challenging times. These are times of tremendous change when we cannot gather the ways we used to gather. These are challenging days when we do not get to see all the people, we are accustomed to seeing. We do not get to hear the voices we are accustomed to hearing or the children we are used to seeing and the hope they give to the church. I don't know about you, but the people I see when we gather, the children I see when we gather, the voices I hear when we gather, well, they give me hope.

The people I see when we gather, they remind me of the people I see in the neighborhood. Sunday morning for me, looks a lot like the rest of the week. Now, while I can't be in the building on Sunday morning, it's the WEEK that reminds me of Sunday morning. When I visit that sight at 38th and Chicago where George Floyd

died, was killed, lynched, it kind of causes me to think of the church on Sunday morning. It causes me to ask the question, "Where is God?" The church does not cut us off from the world, the church connects us to the world. It does not matter if your congregation is in Assante, Jordan, Eden Prairie, Elk River or North or South Minneapolis. The church is the body of Christ connecting us to God's world, God's neighborhood.

Our gospel text for today is from the 11th Chapter of Matthew. Jesus has already been baptized by John the Baptist and fed those 5,000 people on the side of the mountain. Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness. Prior to this morning's text Jesus had been teaching and healing people throughout the land. At the beginning of this 11th chapter, John the Baptist is in prison and he sends word to Jesus. He wants to know if Jesus is the one the world has been waiting for or should they be looking for someone else? John wants to know, "Where is God?" Jesus, are you the ONE? Are you the answer to our hopes, the answer to our dreams, or should we be looking for someone else?

Jesus responds with a "Dah!" Go and tell John what you hear and what you see. "The blind receive their sight. The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

What we see in the text is, Jesus is lifting up John and John is lifting up Jesus. Jesus and John are great leaders in the tradition of the prophets and their mission is to fulfill God's promise of liberation for the people of God. John and Jesus are following in the great tradition of the prophets, they are picking up their mantle and they are saying to one another and to the people of their day, "It is time." CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? The kingdom of God is at hand! It is time.

But of course, there is resistance and there are people who do want or are not able to see or hear the promise in the person of Jesus and John.

I am reminded of when I was growing up as a child. It was way before we had cable television. We had one of those big box televisions. As a family we would gather around that TV when Mohammad Ali had a boxing match. We gathered

around that big box tv when Martin Luther King was giving a speech and the civil rights movement was televised and we saw children being sprayed with water hoses and chased by police dogs. On that big box TV we relied on big rabbit ears antenna to give us reception. Quite often that reception would grow weak. Someone in the family would have to jump up and begin maneuvering that antenna to our reception. They would position the antenna to just the right position to where that reception would provide us with us a clearer picture. As we got older, we learned that that if we added aluminum foil to the antenna it would give us even better reception.

Jesus and John served as prophets. to help people hear and see the promise of God. Since the time of Abraham and Sara, God sent prophets to bring liberation and help people not forget. God sent prophets like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Lydia, Jeremiah, Martin, Bonhoeffer and so many more. It is in this deep, deep tradition and witness that Jesus and John the Baptist offer testimony to the faithfulness of God.

The tension in the text is, people of God, our reception grows weak. In the text Jesus talks about how the people are distracted and unable or unwilling to see. Sound familiar? Our distraction is in the reality of racism. Our distraction is in the reality of white supremacy? The distraction is in the privilege and comfort of living in a nice neighborhoods where “our” children get to attend good schools, and the privilege of living in a country where we don’t have to worry about our children being forced into gangs or into sex traffic and walls are built to protect “our” privilege.

In recent weeks, Minnesota has had a spotlight shined on us. In a lot of ways, the church has been fortunate that the focus has been on the police for a history of abuse and neglect. Thankfully, we have the witness of congregations like Holy Trinity and Calvary and others who have been at the epicenter where the death of George Floyd has turned into an international cry for racial justice and confrontation with white supremacy. That is the reality of South Minneapolis, 38th and Chicago Avenue.

Let us not forget, from Wilmer to Duluth, Albert Lee to Fergus Falls and throughout our state, there are stories. We are the church. Like Jesus and John, we are rooted in that rich prophetic witness to be the voice of God, "Can you hear me now?" We are the church, called and baptized into that prophetic tradition to proclaim, "the blind receive their sight. The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

Amen!