

January 2011: SD Website

FEARLESS AND FLAWED

Fellow Pilgrims:

We have celebrated the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, during the Christmas season. We know he grows up as one of us. He enters His public ministry by going to John the Baptist to be baptized (Matthew 3: 1-17). When He leaves John, the Spirit leads Him into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4: 1-11). After this, He begins to preach and call His disciples (Matthew 4: 12-9: 38). Who does He call? Are they all the same? Did He confront as well as comfort His listeners?

We see He called a variety of people, from fishermen to tax collectors, to be His disciples and followers. He commends a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15: 21-28) and a Centurion in the Roman Army (Matthew 8: 5-13) for their great faith. When we read the Gospel stories and the Book of Acts, we see the disciples and followers behaving in different ways. They were not cookie-cutter clones of each other. The unity is in confessing Jesus as Lord and Risen Savior. “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3: 26-28). In this way, they are one. We see in their behavior and backgrounds, they are very different.

One moment, the disciples speak truth and in the next moment, they show a flawed understanding of Jesus and His ministry (Matthew 16: 13-28). They try to keep children away from Him (Matthew 19: 13-15). When Jesus was arrested, Peter drew a weapon and was rebuked by Jesus. In the courtyard of the High Priest, Peter denied following Jesus. Yet after the resurrection, Jesus tells Peter He loves him. During the crucifixion, most of the disciples hid, except for the “disciple whom He loved” who went with Mary to the crucifixion (John 19: 25-27). Once Jesus appears to them after the resurrection and the Holy Spirit comes upon them in Jerusalem, they are fearless in preaching the Good News of the Gospel. They became fearless in spite of their individual flaws.

Some people think that Jesus was never angry and that Christians should not show anger or disagree. Jesus confronted the evils in His society, often boldly and loudly. “Woe to you...” (Matthew 11: 20-24). He called Pharisees “...a brood of vipers...” (Matthew 12:22-37) and “...hypocrites...” (Matthew 15: 1-20). Jesus did not worry that some of His listeners were offended when He spoke truth bluntly (Matthew 15: 12-20). He warns His followers to beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16: 1-12).

Jesus entered the Jerusalem Temple and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He accuses them of making the Temple a den of robbers instead of a house of prayer (Matthew 21: 12-17; Mark 11: 15-18; Luke 19: 45-48; John 2: 12-16). The cleansing of the Temple was not a snap decision. The Gospel of John is quite clear that Jesus made a

whip and with this whip, drove out the sellers of animals and the moneychangers. When I took my first preaching class in seminary, I was told that our sermons should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I believe this purpose of a sermon has some parallels the ministry of Jesus. He is tender and loving to many, but He is righteously angry and does not soft-pedal His words or actions in the face of evil. He is fearless in doing, speaking, and living God's work and words.

In Scripture (especially Acts and the Gospels), we see this same fearlessness among the followers of Jesus when confront opposition and evil. Yet being human, the followers of Jesus are fallible and flawed, then and now. Paul in Romans 3: 9-31, reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God (verse 23). When we are most certain we are right, it is wise to remember Romans 3: 23 and I John 4: 1-5: 12. We must test our understandings and the results of prayerful consideration, since we could be wrong. We must also ask if these understandings are resulting in love or something else. We must always pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us and dwell within us.

When we confess that Jesus Christ is our risen Lord & Savior, we need to fulfill the Great Commission in our daily lives. "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28: 18b-20). When we leave worship the Deacon says either: "Let us go forth in the name of Christ." "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." or "Let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit." We too must go forth fearless into the world bearing and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we go into the world, we need to be as fearless as the New York City firefighters, police and other first responders on 9/11 who went into the fire because they knew in the very fiber of their being, this was the right thing to do. Bruce Springsteen captured this moment of great self-sacrificing love in his song *Into the Fire*. Please google the lyrics, they will show you true self-sacrificing love for others. Here is the chorus: *May your strength give us strength, May your faith give us faith, May your hope give us hope, May your love give us love.* Here is what Jesus said about such acts, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15: 13) My prayer for you is to fearlessly go forth in the name of Jesus Christ, knowing you are flawed and will be humanly fallible, to love God, love your neighbor, and to love one another as Jesus loved us, showing hope, strength, faith, and love. Be a first responder to those in your life. Amen.

In Christ's love,
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