

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven to you.” – Luke 6:37

Happy March my dear family and friends,

Grace and peace to you, beloved, as we begin the Lenten season. This month we – as a combined parish – humbly walk with our Lord towards Jerusalem knowing His last day will end in Him hanging from a cross. We honor the beginning of Lent on Wednesday, March 6th at St. John’s in Bismarck for a combined Neighbors in Christ Parish Ash Wednesday service, beginning at 7 pm. In our worship service, we are adorned with ashes on our foreheads as a symbol reminding us of our imperfect mortality, and through God’s love and mercy, are marked with the cross of Christ forever. We too share in Christ’s baptism, life, death, and resurrection. Then each Wednesday evening, leading up to Holy Week, we will explore Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, according to the Gospel of Matthew.

Lent also reiterates that no matter what, we are still called to live among God’s faithful people; to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper; to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed; serve all people following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all of the earth. After all, these are the baptismal assurances we have been given, but also have agreed to share with others in the Body of Christ.

This is also why I have chosen this verse from Luke for this month’s reflection, found above. These pearls of wisdom are the keys to the Kingdom of God...but they are so hard to achieve. These themes are so demanding, especially when we have been wronged by someone; we may have forgiven, but do we forget? We judge all the time, though we are called not to...but we do it anyway, though we think we don’t. And some of us have even condemned those whom we love, even when we sit on the other side of the aisle and don’t even acknowledge one another...especially during the Peace or as we come and go in the narthex. *Lent calls us to repent and return to God – this is the time!*

Our God calls us to do better. And again, let us remember...Jesus told the crowd on a level playing field as if He were one of the persons whom had been wronged to forgive. He does not talk down to others, but raises them up toward the Kingdom in which we are called to share in, but more importantly inherit. These are the principles in which we should concentrate on in our own personal lives during this Lenten season. I am not a fan of fasting or giving something up, rather I choose to take on a discipline as the season moves forward. And I invite you to do the same this year.

Our Lord wants us to do better and to show humanity that loving one another through being a good, humble, and disciplined person is what the Kingdom of God is all about. This, my friends, is what the Good News is all about and is what we are called to do...to be blessed in all that we do, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to share it with others.

Welcome to the beautiful season of Lent, and I will see you in worship. God bless you all!

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish