

“Unpopular” – Ascension Lutheran, Pr Jim Sprengle, 6/21/2020, Pentecost 3

- I. **Matthew 10:22; 32-33** – ²² and you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ³² So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven.
- II. **Christianity is not what it once was in America...**
 - a. In the 50'-60's-70's and 80's the Church with a capital C (all Christians) and the local church with a small C, like Ascension were on a growing trajectory.
 - b. I went to our old bulletins – which we have from our beginnings in 1958 all the way up to now.
 - i. On December 11, 1977, we had 553 worshipers attend the 8:30 and 11am services that Sunday.
 - ii. In fact, we probably averaged 500 per Sunday throughout the mid to late 70's
 - iii. Before Covid-19 hit in March, our attendance was around 110-120 per Sunday... kind of sad when we see an 80% decline in worshipers
 - iv. If we have 100 worshipers in this sanctuary it feels full! Can you imagine 250 per service??
 1. And even at our current average, Ascension is still doing better than many other churches in our region and country
 2. But Christianity has gone from a high point – a place where people rallied and made it the center of their lives... down to a trickle as the culture around us claims that spot.
 - c. Even the message of the Bible... many things we used to take for granted as normal and right... are now taboo – very unpopular.
 - d. We might understand how people without faith in Jesus hear the message and callings of Scripture and reject it.... But sadly, even Christians take some of the Word to heart and reject other parts.
 - e. All of us listen to believers and unbelievers say things like, “I think Jesus would not judge people but love them,” or, “Jesus would never condemn anyone for who they are,” or “Love wins over hate.”
 - i. Now, these statements have some truth in them, which is what makes them challenging.
 - f. As Christians, of course we want love to win, we don't want anyone to be condemned or rejected regardless of who they are.
 - i. However, that is only part of the truth... just because Jesus meets people where they are at (in love)... He calls on people to change.

- ii. His love is so pure and holy that He would never leave us in a state of brokenness, but our hearts, our minds and our actions become aligned with God's will.
- iii. Jesus repeatedly says that His message will be rejected and people won't want to hear it – and what was that message?
- iv. I cannot ask you to blurt out your answer... but what was the message of Jesus that would cause so much hatred, division and rejection for the people who brought it into the world?
- v. From the very beginning of His ministry, just after Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil for 40 days, it says in Matthew 4:17, "Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"
 - 1. Jesus never once said, "Rest easy, keep on doing whatever makes you feel good, I'm here to love you while you stay the same."
 - 2. He never once said, "You are fine exactly how you are, don't worry about the Ten Commandments or changing your ways, those things are the old way of doing things – I don't care about that anymore."
 - 3. Jesus never wanted to be accepted or popular – He never said, "If everyone is doing it, it's totally fine for you to do it too."
 - 4. Jesus never said, "Only say kind loving things to people and affirm them in their sins so they don't feel bad about themselves."
 - 5. He didn't say – "If you call someone to repentance or say that something is sinful because Scripture says it is, then you are judging people and you are in the wrong."
- vi. Jesus says – "repent" – change your heart and mind completely and follow MY STANDARDS not your own...
 - 1. And if you tell people to repent of their sins based on God's standards, they will hate you...
- vii. You will never win a popularity contest being a true disciple of Jesus because no matter what, some people will hate you and your message.

III. **What are God's standards?**

- a. Please don't mishear me today – I'm not saying to run out in the streets and rip into people... because love does drive us and not evil intent
- b. But love cares enough to be courageous sometimes and talk about God's standards, which are very unpopular in our culture today.
- c. Consider the reading in Jeremiah – he says he's like a joke or a laughingstock to people around him – and when he speaks God's words to them it brings only criticism and ridicule...ever feel that way as a Christian?

- d. Simply put, God's standards are found in the 10 Commandments – to love God with all our heart, mind, strength and soul – and to love our neighbor as ourselves.
- e. I will tell you some very unpopular messages in society today that come from these commands or God's instruction –
 - i. “Death with dignity” (assisted suicide) and euthanasia and abortion are murder
 - ii. Marriage is between one man and one woman.
 - 1. God's plan was for sex to stay within that framework – and that means if you are not married by God's standard, you are breaking His command.
 - iii. Authority is to be respected until it directly violates God's Word
 - iv. Going to church is not an option, a matter of when we feel like it
- f. When I preach about God's Word to Christians, many assume we are in agreement, but the things I just said will make many of you upset.
- g. Here's some other things that will upset some Christians –
 - i. When we just look the other way when injustice is occurring – or we write off a whole group of people – “those undocumented immigrants” or “those black people” – we are not loving a serving our neighbor.
 - 1. We place the law over the life of a human being
 - ii. If we treat some people with respect and honor, but treat others as “less than” we fail to understand God's plan of salvation for all.
 - iii. When we have such a miserable life that all we can do is run around and steal the joy from others by gossiping and tearing them down – it is no longer following Christ but the devil.
 - iv. If we say we are all about love and Jesus but never read our bibles, rarely attend church, and disagree with most of the Scripture – we are hypocrites.
- h. Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- i. The Bible says in John 1 that the Word became flesh and dwelled with us, and the Word was God... When we reject the Word, we reject Jesus and all the promises and work He accomplished! We do not acknowledge Him...

IV. **Jesus breaks through all the sin and rejection that marks our lives.**

- a. His purpose was clear – to be the Savior.
- b. How did He save us? The Good News is that Jesus, in spite of our failings and lack of love, came into the world to die for us.
 - i. He became the ultimate in “unpopular” as all rejected Him and delivered Him to death... even forsaken by His Father.
 - ii. This death, and His triumph over it in the resurrection were the way God chose to call us to faith – He would pay the price for our sin and through faith we become children of God!
- c. As children, we grow...

- V. **Jesus calls us into a relationship of transformation.**
- a. Nowhere does He call people to stay the same – but He challenges us to follow Him as we are set free from the bondage of sin! (Romans 6:22)
 - b. Please remember what is popular does not always please God... and we stand with Him no matter how unpopular that makes us.
 - c. Continue to delve into the Word – daily remember your Baptism and repent of the sins that entangle... and transform to the likeness of Him (Eph 4:24).
 - d. God will help you endure to the end... and praise be to Him that it's not a popularity contest but the Grace of God that saves us. Amen.