

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 22, 2018

If you were alive in the 1990s and were faced with an awkward or difficult situation, you might have asked yourself, "What would Jesus do?" This popular saying and the acronym WWJD were frequently spoken and often displayed on clothing and jewelry. It was a reminder and a challenge to conduct ourselves in a Christ-like manner.

It seems that many people in the world today have lost sight of this message. What happened to generosity, humility and civility? Our country has become polarized to the point that we have lost sight of common ground that unites us. Even worse is the hatred and vitriol uttered by people on both sides of an issue. How did this happen and how can we fix it?

The readings this week offer guidance. Jeremiah spoke of shepherds that have "mislead and scattered the flock". Modern day shepherds might be those in power such as politicians and business leaders along with their shrewd marketing teams. However, tremendously influential shepherds are our face-to-face and online social networks as well. People as sheep is a good analogy. We have a tendency to conform to the flock, sometimes losing sight of ourselves and our ideals in the process. God knows this about us but does not leave us forsaken.

In Jeremiah, He spoke of gathering His scattered flock and bringing them back to the meadow. He vowed to appoint a righteous leader to reign over them. Who is this leader? St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians answers this question. "In Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have become near by the blood of Christ." Jesus will break down the walls of enmity (hostility toward an opposing side) and establish peace. In Psalm 23, we learn that if the Lord is our shepherd, He shall be at our side, we shall rest in green pastures and only goodness and kindness follow us.

Like today, in Jesus' time, great numbers of people were lost and in need of direction. The gospel of Mark tells us a story to describe Jesus' example of leadership. It seems to be set at the end of a long day. Jesus and his apostles had been preaching without as much as a meal break. When they tried to sneak away to rest alone, the crowds followed them. Instead of being angry, bitter or selfish, Jesus was empathetic. His heart was moved, for the crowds "were like sheep without a shepherd". He patiently, generously and humbly continued to preach the word of God that the people longed to hear. He gave of Himself freely that day and on many occasions described in the gospel culminating with His ultimate sacrifices on the cross so that we may be at peace.

Jesus walks the earth today in each of us that believe in Him. Select shepherds that follow His example of leadership and have the courage to lead others on the right path. We can make a difference in this world. As the old song goes, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." So, next time you are placed in an awkward or difficult situation, ask yourself "what would Jesus do?"

Tracy Schatteman