

“Hospitality or Loose Talk”

Mark 6:1-13

The congregation I served in Fargo, N.D., before moving to Beatrice, NE, happened to be located two blocks from a very busy abortion clinic. So, you can imagine that during my 7 years of serving there, the hot topic continually debated was abortion.

I took the stand that a person cannot just say they are against abortion without doing something to help unwanted children that can come when a woman makes the decision to not have an abortion. The action that I took initially was to volunteer some of my time in a Lutheran Family Services group home for teenagers called Luther Hall. I would spend time counseling with the teenagers there one night a week. After each visit I would write a short assessment for the staff. I share one assessment I wrote on November 22, 1989...

Marie has lacked structure and guidance in her life because of being raised with her 3 sisters by a physically handicapped grandmother. As a result, 3 of the 4 girls are now in group homes. She has always done what she wanted when she wanted. She didn't like school or church, so she decided not to go. With no role model to guide and affirm her, her self-worth is very low; taking an overdose of pills became an option. She does not understand the concept of a God, a father in heaven, a mother active in her and around her, because she has no human parallels to help her understand. She needs some positive adult influence and affirmation that would help her to relate and understand an influential (active) and affirming God. Marie seemed interested in last Sunday's worship service. She talked negatively about being forced to church while in a group home but seems comfortable going with the other kids.

She still has hopes of returning to Devils Lake and graduating from high school there, although she realizes she may be better off in Fargo and making some changes. Luther Hall feels like being “locked up” at this point but she likes her roommate and feels like she’ll do o.k. here. Marie was very friendly and open. A more structured and affirming environment is definitely what she needs.

Hospitality or loose talk? Do we welcome the sojourner into our home, into our church, into our community or do we just talk loosely with no action to back up our loose talk?

Jesus was a sojourner who was sometimes welcomed and, at other times, was the victim of loose talk. In our Gospel text, he made the mistake of returning to his hometown to preach in his home church. Was Jesus shown hospitality and welcomed home or was there loose talk and gossip about who Jesus thought he was? Who does he think he is?

Mark 6:2-3 . . . ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Hospitality or loose talk? Do we welcome Jesus home and listen to his teaching, or do we question his authority because he’s just a local boy, the son of Mary and his brothers and sisters are here with us.

Back in May, I was riding in a Cadillac with a funeral director, Dave, out to Holy Cross Cemetery for a graveside service for little 3-year-old, Max Lamatrice, Dave was describing all the young people's funerals they had hosted in the previous two weeks.

The twenty-something Parma police officer and SWAT team member who had tragically taken her own life. The young man who had hung himself in Metroparks. Another young man who had died from an overdose. Little Max who got hold of a loaded gun.

Do these four deeply grieving families have families, friends, and church to support them along the way? Not surprisingly, the 3 young adults were not active in churches, so priests or pastors who didn't know them officiated their funeral services.

Are young people dying by their own hands because of loneliness, because of depression, because of having no one they trust to talk to, because of loose talk that has gotten back to them?

It is so very difficult to show hospitality to a teenage mother and her baby, to a drug addicted son on his way to an overdose, to a daughter in the pit of depression, to a young person struggling with a stressful job. And yet Jesus sends us out from this sanctuary to do just that.

We are sent out to be present with, to at least be hospitable towards the young people God has placed in our lives. The loose talk comes easy. The hospitality requires Holy Spirit power.

Verses 7-11: He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.

If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”

Hospitality or loose talk? When God puts us on the spot, when God tests us, do we respond with hospitality or loose talk? Do we do something, or do we just talk about it?

We encounter all kinds of loose talk in our relationships with one another. Whether it be taking a stand on a controversial issue like abortion, or what to do with unwanted children, or how to respond to a transient passing through town, or how many cameras or flat screens do we need in our church; there is all kinds of loose talk amongst us. The question becomes: “How do we back up our loose talk with action?” When God puts us to the test, do we just talk about it, or do we do something about it?

Think about what Jesus told his disciples to do in our Gospel text. Take nothing with you, leave home, stay in whatever house that will welcome you, tell people everywhere you go that they need to repent of their sins, cast out demons, and heal people who are sick.

Jesus is telling us that as his followers, he expects us to be people of action ready to make sacrifices in order to get whatever job done he is challenging us to do. Jesus doesn't have time for loose talk. When he encountered the loose talk in his hometown, “he was amazed at their unbelief” and he moved on. He tells his disciples (us) to do the same.

If you can't get anything done in one house, then move on to the next house. If one ministry in the church has run its course and is no longer helping anyone, then start a new ministry. Stephen ministers learn that when they are no longer helping their care receiver, then it's time to move on to new caregiving relationships. Pastors learn that when strong ministry is no longer being accomplished in the congregation they are serving, then it's time to move on to a new congregation. Jesus said: "If you can't get anything done in the house you're in, then move on to the next house".

Loose talk is not what God wants or expects. God expects us and wants us to act on our faith. He expects us and wants us to love one another, to show hospitality toward one another, to work together as a church in meeting the challenges he sets before us.

We will never all agree on what the best or the most appropriate action is. We will never all agree on how to best respond to the handful of issues I've raised in this sermon.

Abortion, death penalty, what to do with unwanted children, how to respond to young people who are suicidal, and the list goes on.

But the worst thing that can happen in a church, the worst thing that can happen to the body of Christ in the world – the church – is to do nothing. When the mouth talks on and on while the body is inactive, the church dies.

I'm proud of the many people doing ministry in this church. The body of Christ in this place is strong because we are faithful, and we work hard. There will still be loose talk and an occasional complaint about the hard work.

But there is a much stronger calling in this place to actively show hospitality to the sinner, to the hungry, to the teenager, to the unwanted child, to the sick, to the imprisoned, to any person in need.

Hospitality or loose talk? Let us pray. Gracious God, help us to understand what it means to bear you cross on our brow. Keep us faithful to your word and move us to be hospitable to the strangers among us. Amen

#712 – Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service