

**“Passing Through”**  
Pastor Barbara Edema, Bridge Pastor  
Sunday, February 3, 2019  
Souper Bowl of Caring

**1 Corinthians 1-13; Luke 4:21-30**

Two churches. We were white, they were black. They came and asked if they could use our sanctuary for their worship services on Sunday afternoons.

**Our** church. There was discussion. There was disagreement. There was a decision. Some people in **Our** church didn't like it much. Even though our large sanctuary sat vacant all of Sunday afternoon, they didn't want others filling the pews.

But we said yes. They could use our empty church for their afternoon worship of God.

They really knew how to worship. To be honest, they seemed better at it than we were.

They could pray. Really pray. They could sing. Really sing. They could preach. Really preach. The piano had never been played like it was played when they worshiped.

I sat in my office sometimes, getting ready for youth group later that evening. I would listen to a worship service that must have made God laugh out loud. God's hands clapped. I'm sure of it.

Jesus went to worship. He stood up to read the scriptures and give a brief statement of God's past and present work.

When Jesus stood up in his home town and read the Word of the Lord, people's eyes were fixed on him. They listened in amazement. Then Jesus began to preach and he said things that didn't sit so well. He talked about God's miracles done outside the Jewish community. God's miracles to the Gentiles, the strangers, the other. The prophet Elijah, during a horrible famine, was sent to a widow in Sidon, and outsider, and enemy of the Israelites and fed her and her son. The prophet Elisha, when many lepers were in need of healing, was sent to heal Naaman of Syria. God's love was not bound. God's love was not roadblocked into one geographical area. Jesus preached what was in the scriptures. That was indisputable. He wasn't making things up; he wasn't telling lies. But his listeners did not want to hear his truth.

So, his neighbors and friends marched him out to edge of a hill with the intent of tossing him over. He said unforgivable things about God. **Their** God.

When we encounter church people, politicians, leaders, or someone on the street who says, "You don't belong." "They don't belong." "God is not their God!" Then we know the places where Jesus is passing through.

Jesus' message of profound love stands in stark contrast to the wrath of judgment, fear, racism and bigotry of those who reject "the other." As soon as a group of people claim God as the deity of their own race or religion, derision and cruelty ensue. It's history. Over and over again.

We are living in these times. From the wretchedness being committed at our southern borders with family separation and torture, to world leaders unleashing dangerous actions in unbelievable power-grabs, to the relatives we can't sit across the table from because of the hatred that spews from their ignorance. We all know what being on the edge of the hill can feel. It's those times when we speak truth to others and they don't like it. When we speak and act under the law of love.

The example Jesus Christ gave us is to speak the truth about the love of God. A love without bounds. A love not claimed by race or creed or religion. A love not ever understood because we are unable to love the way God does.

But back to our church and the dynamic, beautiful African American church that worshiped God. I began to hear things from our group of “good white Christians:”

“I found a tissue in the pew.”

“There were cookie crumbs left on the kitchen counter after they ate. In **Our** kitchen.”

“Have you heard the piano when they play? I’m sure they’re going to break it. Who’s going to pay for that?”

“Why are they here for three hours?”

On and on and on and on and on. Minutiae. Pettiness. Snobbishness. Racism.

Not kindness. Not patience. Not openness. Not acceptance. Not love.

Some people in the white church decided the black church could no longer worship in the white church building.

Some people thought the church was **Our** church.

**And Jesus passed on through.**

I don’t ever want to be where Jesus is passing through. I don’t want to miss the opportunity to hear his word and believe his promises that God’s love transcends religion and denominations. Jesus is everywhere. I never want fear to drive out love or action for all people, not just the ones other individuals called “saved.”

God saves. God sends. God redeems. We are called to do the work or step aside. Jesus is passing through.

(Read 1 Corinthians 13 read from The Message by Eugene Peterson)