

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of hope bloom and grow... Amen.

In our adult study this past week, I shared with the group that I used to intern at a small startup church in Minneapolis...

And one of the things we did while I was there was ask all the members to invite one friend to church on a specific Sunday...

We gave them a couple months' notice and revved up excitement about this bring a friend Sunday...

And then before we knew it, bring a friend Sunday was upon us... And turns out... not one single person brought a friend...

Later we were told that some people did invite others, but they didn't come, while other people didn't feel comfortable inviting someone, and while other people simply forgot...

And in today's society it is not too shocking to unpack what happened that Sunday... Church, for the most part, is not a priority to many people...

I'm sure there are many reasons as to why this is...

But I also have to wonder if it is because of passages like we heard today.

Because today's gospel is dripping with heaviness and even some warnings...

In fact, this gospel is like a big old sign that says... Follower Beware! If you follow Jesus your life will change and that may not always be for the better...

This passage of scripture is uncomfortable, and the theology behind it goes directly against many mainstream Christian churches, who preach the prosperity gospel...

As the prosperity gospel premise is, that if you just pray hard enough and have faith without wavering, that everything will work out great, and in fact, can even work out wonderful... if you just have enough faith...

Which, as all of us know, is not exactly how life is or how life works out...

And Jesus knows this too, as he walked this earth and experienced first-hand how brokenness, sin, and hatred fester in our world. How bad things happen to good people and how life can be heart-breaking and unfair.

And this is true even for Jesus... Jesus who lived a perfect life of faith and engaged in prayer without wavering, did not live a glammers, easy, and by societal standards "prosperous life."

Instead, Jesus chose to live in direct opposition of society, and he was constantly being challenged and questioned...

In fact, he lived so radically that he died for it... And he journeyed to the cross, in a way that absolutely horrific... He was mocked, tortured, and put to death.

But this was God's plan all along...

Which is why Jesus willingly picked up the cross, even though he knew all that he would endure.

Because that cross put an end to sin, brokenness, and hatred, through birthing something new from a symbol that at one time meant only death...

As the cross has now become the place where the resurrection hope was first made possible...

And this is why Jesus said that he does not come to bring peace but a sword... Not because he is pro-violence, but because society was out of hand and needed to be cut down... Specifically, hatred, sin, and brokenness need to be put to death...

Which can only happen when we follow Jesus... Which at times may require us to be as disruptive as Jesus was...

Which in turn may cause divisions amongst those who are not Christ-like in their actions, by calling out their hatred or holding them responsible...

Whether it be standing up for someone who is being bullied, or disrupting unhealthy co-dependent and toxic relationships by speaking up... Speaking up either for yourself or someone else...

Which is easy to say, but in the reality of life, it is not so easy to do...

It is hard to break cycles of violence, hatred, and oppression. It is hard to stand up for mental health and provide resources for those in need...

And especially in our society today, where so many issues have become politicized, it can be uncomfortable to stand up for what is right...

Out of fear that someone may identify you as extreme one way or another...

But the way that Jesus teaches us to live, is by loving one another... And to do that, may sometimes require the heavy and uncomfortable lifting of ending relationships and systems that are no longer rooted in love...

So that each person can find resurrection, hope, and love that they desperately deserve.

Or it may involve speaking out against what is wrong or using your actions to do what is right, so that brokenness can be put to death, leaving space for hope, rebirth, and renewal, where God's love can thrive...

And I realize that this may seem radical and overwhelming...

Because if something so simple, like inviting someone to church didn't even work out, I wonder what people are actually willing to speak up or stand up for?

But if we really are Christ followers and we do take the gospel seriously, then we should at least be willing to attempt some of this work...

And the good news is, we do not go about this alone... We have the support of this community and we have our faith that God is always with us, no matter what we do or endure...

As Pope John Paul II states, "There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already borne for us, and does not now bear with us."

And so, it is my prayer, that you will find courage and hope in these words... That you will enter each day knowing you are called to follow Christ... Through good times, bad times, and when difficult situations arise.

Because you can do hard things... Not because God wants things to be hard for you, but because that is how life is...

So, you can let the heaviness or the politicalness of life get you down and you can ignore your call to follow Christ...

Or you can follow Christ, stand up for what is right, knowing that your life may never be the same...

Because it is in Christ where you find life, hope, and strength...

So that when opportunities arise you can jump right in, knowing that you too can make the world a better place...

You can be the change the world so desperately needs. The kind of change that is only found in Christ's love... Amen.