

Prayer:

How many of us are comfortable with change? Even though we experience change every day in our bodies and our lives, most of us become uncomfortable with the very thought of change. It is difficult to change because we are creatures of habit. If you don't believe me, try this simple exercise. Act like you are angry with me and cross your arms... Which arm is on top? OK, now uncross your arms and try to cross them with the other arm on top...Such a simple change, and yet we struggle with doing it. We have to really think about what we are doing. Those who are ambidextrous probably did not have any problem doing this. But we don't like change because it causes us to feel uncomfortable. Still don't believe me? What do you think would happen if I said everyone had to change their pew and if you are in the front, sit in the back and if you are on the right side move to the left... That isn't such a big change, is it? So why does it make us so uncomfortable? Some would say this is where I always sit. This is my spot. And when the snowbirds come back, I bet they all have their spot, too! We are creatures of habit and we like it when things are predictable and familiar. We do not like it when the unpredictable happens. When we experience unfamiliar things we become uncomfortable.

But think for a moment about the followers of Jesus and what they experienced by becoming his disciples. Their whole life and everything they were comfortable with and believed in, including their faith in God was changed. In some ways, I think Christians have become so comfortable with our faith, that we have forgotten just how uncomfortable and counter cultural following Jesus and his teaching can be. First, let's think about the disciples of Jesus in today's Gospel. Their families were devout Jews. They believed the Messiah would come as a powerful king. When asked Jesus said his kingdom was not from this world. Jesus teaching and life was about the power of love, not the love of power. The Jewish family of the first disciples believed there is only one God. For anyone to imply or say that Jesus was God or the Son of God was blasphemy. It would be a sin punishable by death. (Lev. 24:16) So when Jesus tells his disciples that he has come to divide families, he is warning his disciples that believing in Him and following his teaching is likely to cause even families to split. He speaks of a fire that he desires to be kindling in the believers. He wants the disciples to be on fire when it comes to their faith... The fire that Jesus is talking about is a fire that destroys impurities. There are impurities in the teaching of every religion on earth. Or put more bluntly, there

are crazy radicals in every religion who believe they are the only ones who God cares about. A baptism into Jesus death and his resurrection is a baptism into fire that destroys our selfish sinful thoughts and ways. So if any of the disciples wanted to follow him, they would have to let go of what they are comfortable with and even be willing to sacrifice their relationship with family who refused to believe that Jesus Christ is God's son, the Messiah. They had to change their understanding of God and God's plan for them and for humankind. Jesus spent time with people that the religious folk taught to stay away from. The woman accused of adultery that was about to be stoned, the Samaritan woman at the well, the tax collector, the blind, the lame, and poor! Jesus demonstrated the kingdom of God through his love and compassion for all people. Even those shunned and rejected by religious folks. By following this man and his teaching, the first disciples would be rejected and even shunned by their religious family member.

But what about followers of Jesus today? Are there religious traditions that are not very Christ-like? Do the teachings and actions of the Christian Church truly reflect Jesus life and ministry? Are there some teachings and practices of Jesus that might be rejected by other religious folks if truly followed them? In some ways the answer to that question is easy. It may not be comfortable to acknowledge. But that is because we know that we all play a part in failing to live as Jesus lived and failing to love as Jesus loved. Our faith in Jesus calls us to be transformed. Change is hard, but today, he invites us to come to this banquet which reminds us of God's love for all people. As we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are purified and cleansed of our selfish sinful ways so that we can go out into the world to love and to live as Jesus did.

Pastor Jeff Ungs

Shepherd of the Glades Lutheran Church, ELCA

6020 Rattlesnake Hammock Road

Naples, Florida, 34113

Worship at 9:30 AM

(239) 775-0696 Church

(641) 529-2479 cell phone