

Message - 05-15-22
Ps 148; Acts 11:1-18; Rev 21:1-6; Jn 13:31-35
Our True Citizenship

Our Gospel passage for this morning is very brief. Yet, it is the major movement from business as usual – to the hill called Golgotha, where people were killed by the Roman state. Let your eye wander back a few verses and you will see that Judas Iscariot has just left the supper and gone to the church leaders to betray Jesus. The Lord doesn't have much time to prepare His disciples for what is about to happen. He knows they will not understand about His arrest, torture and crucifixion. Yet, the moment is upon them all. On this side of the cross, that is Jesus' death, we see the Good News. These eleven disciples will not be able to call anything about it "good." Today we call it the Good News.

Much later, the Apostle Peter is explaining his experience on the rooftop to the Jewish Christian church leaders in Jerusalem. The ascended Lord Jesus spoke to Peter, telling him what God has made clean, he must not call impure. It is a massive change in Peter to discern that the Lord Jesus would have him go to the Gentiles, fellowship with them, tell the Good News and stay for dinner.

The leaders strongly condemn Peter when he comes to share the news about an entire Gentile household coming to faith in Jesus. Cornelius, his family and all his servants have heard Peter's message and believed in the Savior Jesus Christ. Controversy is nothing new in the church, is it? It seems to me Peter is right in telling his story. He does not offer any theological argument. He doesn't try to convince anybody of anything. He simply tells what he saw the Holy Spirit do when he shared the Gospel. We are chosen, called and anointed to do the same. See how the folks held fast to the old Hebrew tradition of never entering into fellowship, especially table fellowship, with anybody outside the faith. Peter has been freed from this prejudice by his rooftop vision. And his amazing story finally convinces the church leaders that God desires to bring Jews, Greeks, Romans and all people into His kingdom. The proof is the work of the Holy Spirit in Cornelius' home among former pagans.

Let's return to that supper in the Upper Room on the night Jesus was arrested. The Lord doesn't have much time. They will sing some praise songs and go to the olive grove on the hill. There Jesus' journey to His execution will begin. What is the new commandment Jesus gives them in verses 34 and 35? "Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people (all people) will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Please do not confuse the love of Christ with being nice people. Please do not confuse being generous with the love of Christ with loving others as Jesus loves you, It is good to be nice and generous. I hope you and I are. No. The love of God has to do with the covenant of blood by which our reality is changed. We leave the kingdom of darkness. We are freed from the bondage of wickedness and we leave our worldly citizenship behind. We begin a new life by this new commandment. We are transformed into citizens of the New Jerusalem. Now we sojourn in this world, we live the life of all humanity, as the Lord Jesus did. His purpose is now our purpose: to live out the reality of God's love for the world in that He sent this amazing Son of His to lead all who will follow into the gates of His kingdom to live forever.

Many in our world struggle day to day to get enough to eat – or even anything to eat at all. Many who are better off work to live – sometimes trapped in a job that is not satisfying or creative. In the western nations we have given birth to generations whose basic life-needs are met or exceeded, but they are not satisfied. These are the ones who live in the darkness of a fallen world and its troubles.

I lived in a hotel for two days last weekend. I read my Gideon Bible. It begins not with Genesis 1, but with some questions: Are you alone, depressed, addicted, stressed, cheated experiencing conflict or temptation, considering suicide?"

Page two - "Do you need hope, peace, joy, comfort, purpose, forgiveness, God?"

On page three the Gideons say: God is the answer!

(Continued on next page.)

This page guides the reader to call on God, hear God's invitation to all peoples, then responding to God – and at last What God Does for You. Now, what can the one who loves people the way Jesus does offer someone? “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...”

Then the most loving thing anyone can do for another is to point to the Roman Road – leading to the Sinner's Prayer: Dear God, I confess that I have sinned and done wrong. I believe that Your Son, Jesus Christ, took the punishment that I deserve by dying on the cross and I thank You. I also believe that You raised Him from the dead. I now receive Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Amen

Listen, there is a fashionable teaching going around again these days: “Oh, just love people, don't worry about sin” Seriously? What about the white-hot Love of God that atones, cleanses and transfers a person from citizenship in a fallen world to citizenship in God's Kingdom?

You choose. Will you take the road that has no real direction, no right motives and no holy love? Or will you choose the road to God's presence in Christ, the road to the purposes of our Creator – citizenship in the New Jerusalem?

Amen.