

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

Rev. Michael Schuessler

Text: Acts 9:1

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.”

In the Bible it seems that the people of this world are divided into two groups. In the parable about the farmer sowing seed, weeds and wheat grow together until the harvest. In the parable of the fisherman, good fish are sorted from the bad fish. And when the Son of Man comes in his glory, the sheep will be separated from the goats. As Jesus says, “Those who are not against us are for us.” Of course, we belong to the good group.

Before St. Paul had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he thought he was in the good group also. He could speak of his cultural heritage and knowledge of the Scriptures. But his actions spoke louder than words. As he was breathing murderous threats against the lord’s disciples, Jesus appeared to Paul (who was called Saul at that time.) Suddenly, Paul realized that he had not been serving God after all.

When we look at the actions of others it’s easy for us to put people into one of the two categories. Are they keeping God’s commandments or not? A young man who lashes out in anger against students and staff on a college campus is easily assigned a place among the bad fish by those trying to make sense of such a tragedy. In our sorrow and anger we may be tempted to find consolation in the thought that such a goat will someday hear the words, “Depart from me; I never knew you!”

Then we remember that Jesus has called us to love not only our family and friends, but our enemies as well. That doesn’t mean we allow others to inflict harm. We do what we can to keep everyone, even our enemies, safe from harm. But all too often we are quick to judge and dismiss those who don’t measure up to our standards. When we fail to love our enemies, we find ourselves in Saul’s shoes. Suddenly we realize that we are not serving God after all.

Fortunately, God continues to serve us. Jesus loved Saul, even while Saul was persecuting him. From the cross Jesus prayed for those who crucified him, “Father, forgive them.” His sacrifice has paid for all of our sins and his Holy Spirit has enabled us hear the voice of our Good Shepherd. We are his little lambs. We are good fish. We are the wheat growing in his field. We are these things, not because we are better than others, but because Jesus is our Savior.

Confronted by Jesus, Paul is baptized and sent to serve others in the name of the Savior of the world. Murderous threats are replaced with words of love, forgiveness and encouragement. As the body of Christ we are called to serve others, even those who act as enemies. As we do, God’s Spirit works to call individuals out of darkness and into his light. Imagine how things might have been different last week if a certain young man had found acceptance and love and new meaning in his life from the members of a Lutheran church that cared. Imagine a video tape filled with words of hope and peace. God has called us at St. Timothy to serve people in our neighborhood who are hurting so that none need perish, and all may have everlasting life. Amen.