

-One of the things I love about going back home to Minnesota and staying with my parents is our morning coffee and breakfast time. My parents, believe it or not, still subscribe to the Star Tribune (the Minneapolis newspaper) on a daily basis. I love it because it creates this wonderful time sitting around the table together, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper. It has become a symbol of my vacation when we go back to Minneapolis. However, the first morning we were there, I come downstairs and see the morning headline: "Report: Pennsylvania Priests Molested over 1000 Children." I'm sure our own Missoulian paper ran a similar headline. My heart sank to the floor. The article detailed a Pennsylvania Grand Jury report that spread over a period of 60+ years (some accusations are from the 1940's) and documents multiple priests in dioceses across the state who were found to have molested young children whom were part of their parishes and communities. Nothing in my mind can be more profoundly evil than an authority figure (especially one that represents an institution tasked with living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ) who clearly harms and violates a life for their own satisfaction or gain. Furthermore, if this reports' claims are true, it is even more repugnant that an institution tasked with living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ failed to address such serious and inexcusable behaviors. I have continually been thinking of these new found victims throughout my time in MN and following my return to MT. As a new father myself, I can't imagine what the parents of these children had to and are presently going through right now.

-I think it's easy for us, even here at OSLC, to put this solely on the Catholic Church. "Well," we might think, "that's the Roman Catholic Church's problem. We are Lutheran and we know better." As our own ELCA bishop of Montana, Jessica Crist, writes: "And much as we wish it were not so, this evil was not limited to the Catholic Church. While not on the same scale, sexual exploitation in religious circles has affected almost all religious groups, to greater or lesser extent. And we, the ELCA, are not exempt. We, who believe that we are simultaneously saints and sinners, know that human beings are subject to sin."

-Given this context, perhaps Jesus' words strike a different tone. "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

-It's interesting how in many ways Jesus and his disciples are almost being the confrontational ones here. One could make an argument, I suppose, of why not? Why not wash your hands before every meal? It seems like a very minor practice to take the Sadducees and Pharisees to task on. We in the 21st century forget, too, that a lot of Jewish law was there not just out of respect for the Divine, but to also help govern good hygiene and living together in community. Washing yourself before every meal wasn't just for giving honor to the creation where this food came from and the blessings from God, but also protect you from getting sick. Many customs laid out in the book of

Deuteronomy actually have similar two-part goals. In short, this Jewish custom doesn't really seem all that obtrusive and it did, for ancient communities, serve a purpose.

-Jesus is clearly trying to make a bigger point than just eating food with dirty hands.

Thus, if all we do is say: "Well, Jesus is the Son of God and can do whatever he wants" and then blame the Pharisees for trying to "trap" Jesus, then I think we turn this text into something pretty cheap. At the end of the day, this text isn't about dirty hands or even about accusations from ancient Jewish leadership. What this text is about, I think, is being authentic.

-Pastor and blogger Rob McCoy writes: "Jesus cares more about the heart of the law than the letter of the law. He cares more about people than with tradition. We in the church who sometimes hide behind 'how it's always been done' tend to forget that."

-If you were to express in one word or phrase what does being a Christian mean to you, what would that be? (Ask for words from congregation) The Barna Research Group (a well known pollster) did a recent study that asked: "what words or phrases best describe Christianity today?" 91% of non-Christians ages 16-29 used the word "anti-homosexual" as their first word of choice. 80% of self-identified church goers in the same age group responded with the same word. You know what the next popular words/phrases were respectively in this study? "judgemental", "hypocritical", and "too involved in politics".

Pew research found a record 27% of the United States population would classify themselves as a "Spiritual none" and do not have any connection with a particular religion or congregation. Yet, if you ask "do you believe in God or participate in a religious practice in your life?" close to 90% respond yes. As one researcher I found wrote: "it is becoming clear that a large portion of the United States is seeking some form of spiritual fulfillment yet is growingly disgusted with an inauthentic church that is shrouded in sexual abuse, judges character in hypocritical ways, and assists to elect officials who don't care about them." A piece of me has to say: who blames them?

-For dare I say most of this country's population (especially young adults), being a Christian means something almost completely opposite to what probably most of us in this room see as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are seen in many ways as inauthentic, non-genuine people who disregard the love that Jesus proclaimed.

-Not only, then, does the headline I read back in Minnesota reveal the countless atrocities that were committed by church leaders and the countless number of victims that need justice, but it also further cements a definition in the wider populations' mind about what it means to be Christian which is utterly frightening. In other words, it makes our job harder.

-"Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

-So what do we who remain Christian do? How do we preach a different gospel of genuine authenticity, acceptance, and love? Perhaps the book of James can help: "But

be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.”

-How can we strive to be authentic “doers of the word”? John Lund, pastor of Emmaus Campus ministry (and who led worship here last week), responded once to a question of how to engage young people in faith: “Lutheran Christians can’t be afraid anymore of going public. Everything we do must be made public.” A public, authentic faith that cares more about people and the world verses strictly the rules.

-Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, OR takes being public to a whole new level. Pastor Mark Knutson does a press release on a specific issue every quarter. Isn’t that amazing? Every quarter, Augustana discerns the next step on multiple issues: immigration, climate change, homeless advocacy, food and hunger, etc. Upon coming up with a concrete next step on an issue, Pastor Mark gets as many church members he can along with other ecumenical partners. They invite the local news stations to come out and videotape all of them standing on the front steps of their church giving a press conference. Yes, Augustana Lutheran Church, a former little norwegian congregation....giving a press conference. More often than not, because of Augustana’s authentic reputation (meaning they usually are able to do what they say they are going to do), these press conferences are run on the evening newscasts.

-”But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” What does our call to be authentic public Christians look like in our context? Maybe it’s not going to be press conferences, but it sure could be sharing our facility with an after-school youth program, or showing up and being a partner in Bonner Community Council discussions, or helping tutor a child at Bonner School.

-Whatever it is, may we as a community of faith be able to show up and authentically share our commitment to the one God of all publically. May we be able to say unequivocally: “you belong here whoever you are because God made you who you are.” May we be able to break through and take a stand for genuine love, justice, and freedom in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.