

April 10, 2016
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “People Change”

The word ‘worldview’ keeps coming up in my reading.

Changing someone’s ‘worldview’ is identified as a key to peace making and conflict resolution.

Gaining insight into someone else’s worldview is recommended as a strategy for community building.

What is your worldview?

How did it develop and how has it changed over time?

Does it affect the way you see things or understand people different than yourself?

Earlier this week Dick Taber and I were discussing how some of the Holy Week scriptures sounded anti-Semitic to us: Pilate saying, “Do you think I am a Jew? It was your own people and their chief priests who handed you over to me;” and last week’s reading from John’s gospel reporting “the door of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.”

New Testament scholar Raymond Brown points out that the anti-Jewish nature of these passages emerged only when a new religion was formed around belief in Christ as the promised Messiah. “Jews and Christians were not able to say in this instance that one of *our* own whom God raised up was made to suffer by *our* leaders. Instead, Christians spoke to Jews of *your* leaders doing this to *our* savior, while for Jews it was *our* leaders doing this to *their* false prophet.”

The worldview went from Jesus as a Jew to Jesus as a Christian and centuries of anti-Jewish rhetoric took hold.

These passages of scripture have been used to fuel anti-Jewish sentiment time and again, without challenge.

Today, we hear these words differently.

Our worldview has changed.

Perhaps we know more of the story or simply have a clearer understanding of the issues at hand.

Maybe we are evolving beyond our tribal mentalities.

Think of how many times in your own life you have changed your ideas, opinions or beliefs.

Entire industries are dedicated specifically to motivating you to do this.

A simple example:

Just last Monday night I found myself staying up hours past my bedtime to watch the Villanova Wildcats win the NCAA title. (How about those wildcats?!)

Now I lived quite comfortably for 58 years without watching a basketball game or caring who played in the ‘final four.’

However, my son who graduated from Villanova in 2014 and my husband who graduated from Villanova in 1979 bonded over this basketball team and a family of fans was born.

Text messages between California, Washington, DC and Salisbury kept our family in touch throughout the month of March.

Now, my worldview of loving my son and enthusiastically supporting those things he loves has not changed...however, what he loves has changed, so now I watch basketball.

Encountering the risen Jesus Christ dramatically changes the worldview of two important biblical figures in this morning’s readings.

Angry, hateful Saul is transformed into loving, faithful Paul by his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Simon Peter, son of John was transformed from the denying disciple to the proclaiming disciple via a short conversation at breakfast.

I want you to think about how you would have felt about each of these men if you had only met them at their worst.

If you met Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples or Peter, denying that he had any knowledge of Jesus from Nazareth, how would you have responded?

Our scriptures provide these stories to remind us that God has created us with the outstanding ability to transform ourselves from one type of being to another.

The sinful ways that define these two men in their early lives are wiped clean by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

By God’s grace they are able to embrace a new way of life, one rooted in faith and love.

Think of the irony of Paul’s words to the Corinthians being read at thousands of weddings each year to proclaim deep, abiding love and Peter being the ‘rock’ upon which our church is built.

This opportunity is available to us as well.

Our ability to change ought to inform our capacity to accept change in others.

We must be open to the idea that both people and institutions can change, particularly for the good.

Change, rather than being viewed as a diminishment of 'what was' must be viewed as an opportunity for what can be.

Dreams are rooted in the belief that things can be different than they are – better.

Earlier this week, on April 4, we commemorated the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated.

In James Cone's book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* he writes: *When King agreed to act as the most visible leader in the civil rights movement, he recognized what was at stake...he was nearly overwhelmed with fear.*

Cone recounts a story that Dr. King often told about what he called his 'spiritual midnight' when he struggled with what could happen to him, his wife, and newborn baby girl.

One night, after receiving a midnight telephone call threatening to blow up his house if he did not leave Montgomery, Dr. King heard God say to him, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even to the end of the world."

His house was bombed three nights later and he credited his encounter with God as giving him the power to handle the crisis calmly.

His worldview changed from one of fear to one of calm determination.

God created us with the ability to act out our faith in a myriad of ways.

We are commissioned with Peter to *Feed Christ's lambs; Tend Christ's sheep; and Feed Christ's sheep.*

Is there something about you that needs to be changed in order to meet the terms of this great commission?

Are you generous enough to feed the lambs and sheep with your resources?

Are you compassionate and humble enough to tend the sheep?

Do you need to learn something new in order to serve God in today's world?

Writer, Alvin Toffler argues "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." I would extend that to churches as well.

We are entering a new time where our worldviews must be examined.

Our values must be clear and our choices must be made based on those values.

In preparing for Dick Dwelley's memorial service next week I had the opportunity to revisit the full text of the original "Serenity Prayer" written by Reinhold Niebuhr. I share it with you in

closing:

GOD, grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change,
Courage to change the
things I can, and the
wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardship as the
pathway to peace.
Taking, as He did, this
sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it.
Trusting that He will make
all things right if I
surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy
in this life, and supremely
happy with Him forever in
the next.
Amen