

PROPER 24, PENTECOST 20, YEAR A, OCTOBER 18, 2020

I'd like to tell you a story this morning. It's about a young man who owned a sports car. He not only pampered his car but he loved to drive it fast. Since he lived in California, he liked nothing better than to take his sports car out onto the winding mountain roads and open it up. One particular day he was reveling in the skill he possessed as he maneuvered his car around sharp hairpin turns at breakneck speeds. But as he approached a rather treacherous curve, another car came careening around the bend from the opposite direction and forced him off to the side of the road.

As the car narrowly missed side swiping him, the driver of the car, who happened to be a woman, stuck her head out the window and yelled pig at him. Needless to say, the young man was incensed at what had just taken place. He was quite shaken from being forced off the road and then to add insult to injury this woman who had nearly side swiped him had the audacity to call him a pig. After all she had been in the wrong.

So being quite angry and needing to soothe his male pride after such a chauvinistic remark, the young man decided he would prove who was the better driver even if she could no longer see him. So he pulled back onto the road; accelerated quickly and took the treacherous turn with tires squealing only to come around the bend and run headlong smack into the pig.

I dare say we all feel like that young man today because I believe we all have hit the proverbial pig this year. These times are certainly unrepresented and present a lot of challenges for every one of us. And every time we think we've avoided the pig in the road another one seems to appear. That has become the norm for this year 2020.

But that's not the reason I told this story this morning. I told it because it is a perfect example of a paradigm. Webster defines paradigm as how we see things, a particular perspective or model. A very simplistic paradigm is seeing things from a conservative or liberal point of view. The young man obviously interpreted the word pig from a particular perspective, believing it to be a chauvinistic remark which in the end did not prove very helpful to him.

So in looking at this story what does it mean for us. You, as the family of St. Luke's have certain paradigms, in other words, certain ways of doing things. Now, I also have my own paradigms or perspectives. So, in order to prevent running headlong into the pig, we will weave a relationship together that more than likely will incorporate various paradigms. And in doing so we will create a pattern under which we will operate. In other words together we will find our ministry together and the paradigms that will work for us.

One thing to remember though is that we should never become too comfortable with our style of ministry. We need to constantly look for ways to do things that will proclaim the gospel the best way we know how. You know Jesus was the biggest breaker of patterns. He turned everything upside down forcing people to the edge of their beliefs in order to rethink their sense of social justice, duty, care for each other, their own self

respect, their love for themselves and others and the need to be responsible stewards of all of God's creation. You only have to look at what Jesus said and did to realize this.

Even in today's gospel when Jesus was asked a trick question about whether to pay taxes to Caesar, He answered in a way that is much more radical than if he had said either "Pay the tax" or "Don't pay the tax. The question was "Give us your ruling on this: are we or are we not permitted to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor?" To the Jews, treating an emperor as a God was idolatry. So just using the coin with Caesar's likeness on it might constitute idolatry in Jewish law, and thus be forbidden. To use the coin to pay taxes to this same Caesar was still worse! But by Roman law the taxes must be paid. So the "trick" was that by answering one way, Jesus would break Jewish law; by answering the other way, he would break Roman law. Either way, he would be in hot water and give a good reason for his arrest.

But what Jesus did was to change the paradigm. He redefined the issue: "Give your whole self to the One who has imprinted divinity upon you Jesus says! And that is the point of this story. All I have done, Jesus says, is to remind you we are all the coinage of God."

So for us to render unto God the things that our God means acting in the power of God's Love in the world, using responsibly and wisely what we have been given to deal with all the circumstances of our lives whether they be political, domestic, public, private or social welfare concerns.

Jesus broke through many a given paradigms to form new ones. The poor will be blessed, the meek will inherit the earth, the peacemakers will be God's children, the last will go first, the first last; there are no insiders and no outcasts, no servant and no master. All the normal ways of doing things are stood on their heads. Good is returned for evil, enemies redeemed by love and even the wayward son is welcomed home, given the robe, a ring, the fatted calf and a party.

Our ministry is to declare and live out the liberating, freeing saving good news of Jesus Christ who calls us to wholeness, redemption and service. You and I are called upon to be creative and to take risks in order that Christ's message of healing love never grows stale or comfortable. We can say it's not my job or problem to do something" about the sufferings and problems people face in the world. However God is working through us and using our gifts to do what we can and use all our abilities to join in the work of Love.

The opportunities and possibilities for a lively, enriching cooperative ministry that are before us are innumerable and ripe. Let's take advantage of them. We stand at the threshold of an exciting life together. Yes, we might hit some pigs along the way, but that is all part of our ministry together. So let us not only be responsible but response- able to our mission and let us never lose sight of our dancing Lord who has nurtured all of us very generously and brought us here together in this place so that God's word will be proclaimed and heard loudly and joyfully. Amen