

Fear of the Other

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 04/19/20

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

Now this may have been a phenomena only experienced by Baby Boomers, but I remember people who were infected with “cooties.” To my experience in elementary school, girls were the most likely to be infected.

But I also distinctly remember some girls during recess talking about not touching boys because they had cooties.

As it turns out, the most popular boys and girls didn’t seem to be infected at all.

Every generation has a group of those to be fearful of. When we live with an underlying fear of certain people, too often our response to that fear is almost never admirable. We are lead us to do (or say) the wrong thing – and feel good about it!

There’s a reason why we pronounce Berlin and New Berlin, Wisconsin the way we do. It was because of the fear of German-Americans with the onset of World War I and the menace the so-called “Huns” were to the war effort.

One of our Methodist bishops, Garfield Bromley Oxnam, was brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953 made against him. This time, the scary word used was “Communist.”

because of accusations

Adam Hamilton, whose book, UNAFRAID, we are using as an outline for this sermon series, wrote about a conversation he had with Emanuel Cleaver III, pastor of St. James UMC on the other side of Troost Ave. in Kansas City.

Troost Ave. is the street in Kansas City that divides predominantly white K.C. from predominantly black K.C.

Rev. Cleaver told Adam how, as an African-American, the west side of Troost Ave is the place where young black men could be arrested, beaten, and even shot.

Fear of the Other

Every major and medium city has its “Troost Ave.” For Milwaukee, it has been the Menomonee Valley.

Who do we fear today? Fear of people of different backgrounds still persists today. Different races; different national backgrounds; immigrants; members of the LGBTQ community; those of a different political party.

Today, we hear from the scripture, these words: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

We know that there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love. On this Sunday after Easter Sunday, we realize that God is not going to let even death itself can come between us.

Jesus teaches that we are to love our enemies and to pray for them. And when you do that, you realize that love is not a feeling; love is an action and a decision.

Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to bless them. To do that, we need to seek to understand and know them. And when we do all that, we’re going to discover that it’s hard to be afraid of them.

When a black man joined the Men’s Study group in a church I served, it changed everyone’s attitudes and lives. When we shared from the heart of our own experiences and faith – the trepidation he felt in coming to suburban Milwaukee; the experiences in the criminal justice system; his own personal faith in Christ; and when we shared our lives;

ALL OF OUR LIVES WERE CHANGED AS
A RESULT.

And you know, when you have the faith to trust God, all of those code words and terms that are intended to create fear, (sometimes by our national leaders), begins to melt away. Love melted them away.

Fear of the Other

No longer can they be used to scare or intimidate or divide.

The New Testament tells us: “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear.” People who may be different from each other are called to understand.

are now neighbors that we

It is, after all, what God has done for us. God’s love for us as we see it by Christ’s death on the cross – even while we were still enemies or strangers to God – God loved us even then.

Dear friends in Christ, you and I are freed to live in God’s love.

We are freed to examine our world, our thinking, and our lives.

We no longer need to fears other; we can live unafraid. Thanks be to God!