

“America the Beautiful?”

Pastor Jan Shannon

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Scripture:

Galatians 6:1-2, 7-10, 12-16 (CEB)

1 Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. 2 Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. 7 Make no mistake, God is not mocked. A person will harvest what they plant. 8 Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. 9 Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. 10 So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith. 12 Whoever wants to look good by human standards will try to get you to be circumcised, but only so they won't be harassed for the cross of Christ. 13 Those who are circumcised don't observe the Law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised, so they can boast about your physical body. 14 But as for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through him, and I have been crucified to the world. 15 Being circumcised or not being circumcised doesn't mean anything. What matters is a new creation. 16 May peace and mercy be on whoever follows this rule and on God's Israel.”

Sermon:

This sermon was preached in the park during our outdoor worship, and was more of a conversation with the assembled folks than a traditional sermon, so where there seem to be blanks, I was asking the questions openly for folks to reflect on or respond out loud.

So, there I was, an 18-year old airman one-striper just barely out of basic training, carrying a load of school books across the base, when all of a sudden there he was. An Army captain

walks toward me on the same sidewalk and I scramble to remember the etiquette. “Good afternoon, Sir!” I crisply said, expecting the requisite nod of dismissal in return. But no! Mr. Angry Captain says, “What’s the matter, Airman, don’t you salute?!” Ugh. “No, Sir, I mean, yes Sir, I mean...” “Quit talking and drop those books! I’m waiting!” So I put down my load of book and saluted smartly. Trying to save other unsuspecting airmen the same pain, I thought maybe education would help. “Sir, permission to speak?” “Yes?” “Just so you know, in the Air Force we are not required to render a salute if we are carrying a burden. All we are required to do is render a verbal greeting. Since this is an Air Force training base, I’m just trying to save you some hassles, because every airman you meet will respond as I did, and we are not being rude. Just following orders.” Grumpy Army Guy made some wisecrack about how the Army is superior to the Air Force, and walked away. Pretty sure education didn’t help...

Rules specific to one community can negatively affect our relationship with another community. How can we bridge those gaps in understanding for the sake of unity?

Talk about cultural differences between Germany and the US, that cannot be utilized in the other country because cultural differences affect those laws and structures and cannot be utilized by the other.

The Kingdom of God is a society, if you will, that is radically different in nature and practice than the society we live in.

From the gospel lesson, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20: Verse 1 After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. 2 He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. 3 Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. 5 Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ 6 If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7 Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ 10 Whenever you enter a city and the

people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 11 'As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God's kingdom has come to you.'

If Jesus knew they would be sheep among wolves, why didn't he let them take weapons?

Did you notice that whether or not the disciples were welcomed, they were to say that the "Kingdom of God has come upon you."?

"Jesus also tells them to unpack any feeling about the results. When things go wrong, he says, stop, and move on. There's no back-up plan, no emergency rescue, no divine intervention. Interestingly, he says "when" you fail, not if. He already knows that some failures are built into this journey of speaking for him. He's calling them – and us – toward a radical kind of acceptance that's rare – and hard work. This ability to receive what's given is a spiritual journey in itself, before we ever say a word for God."

What things do we need to leave behind in order to work together in unity to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Some examples of things the congregation responded with:

- our politics
- our preconceived notions of what is acceptable behavior – manners, language, the way people dress, etc.
- our need to be 'right'

Can we, as an Open and Affirming congregation of the UCC work with faith groups in Spokane to house the homeless even if it means that LGBTQ folks wouldn't find a place there?

Where do we draw the line on unity?

Communion - all Christians celebrate this feast – the ones that agree with us and the ones that don't. We are all Christians, and we should not limit who eats with us.