

Today, our national bishop, Bishop Eaton has invited and encourage all pastors serving in the ELCA to preach on racism. As I thought about how I wanted to address this very important issue, I came to feel that I was being led to talk of all isms such as racism, ageism, sexism or whatever ism you want to throw in there.

There are people in this world who feel that they are better because of their race, their age, their gender, their job, their social status, their education, their wealth, their car, their house, their whatever they want to use to distinguish themselves against another. We live in a world where each one of us is different. Every single person who has come to worship today is different and it is also possible that some believe that they are better than another because of those differences. And that is the attitude that needs attention.

I can say that I don't really understand how somebody can think that one group of people is better than another group of people because of skin color, gender, age or some other difference. Each one of us was created in God's image and God loves us just the way we are.

But some feel that those differences give them the right to mistreat others. Every one of us is part of the Body of Christ. We each have different roles and functions within that body but none are better than another. That is the easiest way for me to explain the importance of each person. We all are important and have a function to perform as the body of Christ in the world.

Or am I wrong? Are some people more important or more valuable to society because of age, race or gender?

As we look at our gospel reading for today, a Syrophenician woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter of an unclean spirit and Jesus said, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Let the children be fed first instead of throwing the food to the dogs. This actually sounds like a racist statement by Jesus because he is saying that the Syrophenician woman is a dog. Well technically, he is saying that all people who are not Jewish are dogs.

So what does that make us? Dogs. I think I can honestly say that there is not one Jewish person here today and if you are not Jewish, then you are a dog.

Now the woman would not let Jesus off that easily and said, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And Jesus responded, "For saying that, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

I have no desire to get into a is Jesus racist discussion on this because Jesus was using this as a way to demonstrate that God's love is meant for all, even the non-Jewish people. Back then, the Jewish people did believe that if you were not a Jew, then you were nothing. And so a good Jewish man could very easily have said that the non-Jews were dogs. I also find it interesting that a woman is used to challenge Jesus in this story as well because women were considered property and just barely above the status of slaves. But then Jesus had a tendency to go against the normal beliefs of the time.

Jesus used this Syrophoenician woman to show that God's love and mercy is meant for all. It did not matter that she was not a Jew. It did not matter that she was a woman. What mattered to Jesus was her faith.

Last Sunday morning, a sign showed up on my feed for facebook and it fit in with today so I wrote it in my calendar so I would not forget it. It stated, "If you hate anyone because of your faith, then you are doing it wrong."

If you hate or look down upon any group of people because they are different than you, then you are not living in the love of God. You are not embracing the love of God that helps you to love and serve all people and not just the ones who are like you.