

## Reflections on Faith and Life for January 31, 2021 (Epiphany 4, 2021)

Both St. John and St. Stephen use *Christ in Our Home* as a daily devotional. Last Sunday's reading carried an important message. Jesus was calling fishermen to become disciples who would "fish for people." The author writes that some people (i.e., pastors) are called to be spiritual or organizational leaders in their faith—but not everyone. The world needs *all* people of faith, she writes, to use their God-given gifts for the good of all—people who strive "**to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God**" (Micah 6:8). A pastor is a spiritual leader, but *every* follower of Jesus is a minister of the faith in his/her own right.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes *Unfolding Light* for Wednesday speaks to Mark 1:24, part of our gospel for January 31. *The (unclean, demonic) spirit cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."*

Pastor Steve writes: *Yes, he has come to destroy. The forces of evil know Jesus is out for nothing less than a loving, healing assault on the power of evil itself. Every healing by Jesus is a cosmic act, an insurrection against the Empire of fear and death. Jesus looks into you, hears the demons that steal your voice, and sees in you the universe and its longing for healing. And that's what he heals. He speaks to what's deep within, a word that's a bit of the mending of the world.*

I omitted the New Testament reading for this Sunday because it requires a lot of context-setting and explanation. But Wednesday's *God Pause*, a daily on-line devotional from Luther Seminary, sums up the meaning very well. I invite you to read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 before reading Pastor Loren Barker's interpretation—but it's a powerful message even without Paul's 13 verses:

*So many issues and problems in the world, in the church, and in our lives. So much division and strife. Where do we begin? The Apostle Paul argues that love for others takes priority over knowledge and personal rights and freedom. Paul asks what would be the most loving thing to do to build up others as we deal with any issue. This is a tough word. It is a Garden of Gethsemane word: "Not what I want, but what you want," Jesus prayed. Love is a word that speaks with the authority of God. That word is proclaimed in the life of Jesus, and it is commanded to those who would follow him. **What is the loving thing to do for our neighbor?***

[Note: this is the question we Lutherans were invited to consider last March when we were first recognizing how to protect ourselves and others from the coronavirus. The answer was, and is, to wear masks and maintain social distancing.] *Is that being naïve? Yes. It is even foolishness, says Paul. But love is the power of God at work in our lives and in our world. As hard as it may be, it is the way of our Savior and God.*

Pastor Loren ends with a prayer: *Loving God, help us look beyond our wants and our rights and our freedom to reflect on what may be the most loving action for our neighbor, so that we may build up one another in love. Amen.*