

Grace and peace to from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For years I have prayer walked south Minneapolis from Trinity First on Franklin Avenue down to Lake Street, and on Lake Street between Chicago and Bloomington. I have also met pastors for missional coaching at several of the ethnic eateries on Lake Street. I know the story one of the locations I have frequented. His vision for his people group to redevelopment Lake Street led him, at great personal cost, to buy a two-story building on the southwest corner of Bloomington and Lake, provide entrepreneurial training for tenants, and open a Mercado. There are several walk up eateries in that building.

Another eatery is Somali restaurant at Chicago and Lake Street, a perfect place for groups to gather around the aromas of East African food, which in Somali tradition includes an ample amount of spaghetti. Your fork is flatbread called Injera. There are sinks in the eating area in case you need a napkin.

Lake Street on those prayer walks and visits was lively and busy. The mixture of green and red awnings signaled the ethnic revival of this beautiful street.

Rioting and looting have changed all that. I prayer walked it again on Wednesday for an hour. Lake Street is as clean as I have ever walked it, thanks to hundreds of volunteers. It is also eerily empty. Boarded storefronts covered extensive damage. Many livelihoods are interrupted, or gone. A handful of eateries have 'open for carry out' signs posted.

Bloomington and Lake Street was a busy intersection the first night of rioting and looting. I was anxious about that Mercado. The building looked good from a distance, and upon arriving...a banner: "Open for business". Thank you, Lord. I'll eat here on my next listening prayer walk in two weeks.

I had read that the Somali restaurant had been damaged. I wondered how much. I could see the damage to the outside when I got there. The windows were boarded up, the door was open, and a sign said: "Open for carryout." Thank you, Lord. I'll come back here, too.

On my hour-long walk I saw less than 20 people. I had one longer conversation with a life-long resident of the area, and two shorter chats – at a bus stop and coffee shop. All three 'hope' for the return of Lake Street. Their tone expressed 'it's going to be a long recovery.' All three indicated they were believers, though one got quiet at that point.

My Wednesday prayer walking was listening...Lord teach me, then nudge me...give me your word.

First word: We pursue the contentment of living in the tensions of God's grace.

A pastor friend is a parish pastor and part time chaplain with the Minneapolis Police Department. He wrote a letter to his congregation regarding what had taken place at the end of May. First he lamented the present circumstance, then said:

One thing I treasure about our Lutheran heritage is that we pursue the contentment of living in the tensions – we are fully saint and fully sinner...we live in the now and the not yet. Living in the tensions means that we know that one-day all that is evil – racism, hatred, murder, violence,

anarchy, oppression will be destroyed. But, unfortunately, until Jesus comes back to make all things new, all that is evil will continue to exist in this broken world

"...living in the tensions"...in this fallen world we live in the tensions of racism, hatred, murder, violence, anarchy, oppression, plus others. These are tensions that divide and destroy relationships. Lake Street is an example.

But, my pastor friend wrote: *"we pursue the **contentment** of living in the tensions,"* tensions that restore relationships.

Think Good News! Think of Jesus entering this broken world, at great cost to himself, giving gifts His perfect life, innocent death and powerful resurrection for us to pursue the contentment of living in the tensions of his Grace...the Means of Grace: **"We were buried with Christ by baptism into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, we, too, might walk in the newness of life."** **"Take, eat, this is my body given into death for you; take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins."**

The sacramental gift of repentance and faith is God's 'good news' for our daily living though which we daily put sin to death in our body and daily rise to the newness of life in Christ [that's good news]...receiving Christ's body and blood for the full forgiveness of our sin and being restored to serve God by serving others [that's good news].

Perhaps more than **contentment** of living in the tensions of grace, but, **joy**. Hebrews 12.2: *"...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. We are called to find contentment, yes, even joy, in perfecting our faith as God's word molds our will to be conformed to His will.*

God desires all people to pursue the contentment of living in the tensions of His grace.

Second word: The Kingdom of Heaven is near and I'm part of proclaiming it.

In today's gospel Jesus sends out the 12 disciples with the words: *"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."* Mark's gospel records the send of the 12 this way: *"So they set out and preached that the people should repent. They also drove out many demons and healed many of the sick, anointing them with oil."*

Jesus began his earthly ministry with these words: *The Kingdom of Heaven is near, repent and believe the good news.*" God always gives what He asks for. Repentance and Faith are **GIFTS** of the Kingdom of heaven. The healings and casting out of demons are **SIGNS** of the Kingdom.

In Matthew 4 Jesus called disciples and took them on a mission trip through Galilee *"teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people"...*

And Jesus became famous, until he wasn't. People demanded more and more **SIGNS** and rejected the **GIFTS** of the Kingdom of Heaven.

To this day, the fallen world demands **SIGNS** [the absence of racism, hatred, murder, violent, anarchy and oppression], or seeks **WISDOM**. But we preach **CHRIST CRUCIFIED**, a stumbling block to those who seek signs and wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1.22

Jesus' instructions to the disciples in Matthew 10 are our instructions too.

First up: *"As you go, say, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,..."*

- I know that God wants everyone I meet to have Kingdom GIFTS [repentance and faith] and to pursue the contentment, yes, joy in living in the tensions of His grace.

Then, further instructions...

1. *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves;"*
 - I am to know Jesus' voice so well that I will easily discern Satanic lies, distortions and evil intent.
2. *"therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."*
 - *shrewd* – intelligent, prudent, sensible, wise – keep your head informed by the Spirit of Truth.
 - *innocent* – not mixed; not tainted by sinful motives of self/others:
 - *in other words, lead with your head to be part of the solution.*
3. *"you will be hated by everyone because of my name."*
 - because the fallen world reject Kingdom GIFTS and demand Kingdom SIGNS. 1 Corinthians 1.22, above.
4. *"he who endures to the end will be saved."*
 - engage this spiritual warfare with certainty that God will one day avenge all evil and wickedness.

There is much good news as we pursue the contentment of living in the tensions of God's grace.

- the volunteers who cleaned up Lake Street daily.
- the thousands of bags of groceries that showed up on Lake Street for several days
- the five carload of groceries received in our parking lot and driven to Sherman school.
- the huge turn out of volunteers at two Trinity First community events who shared Kingdom GIFTS as they handed out Kingdom SIGNS.
- many of you who are diving into scripture and praying how we will be the church as the next normal arrives.
- each one of us asking Jesus to mold our will to be conformed to His will as we seek to be known by love, live by faith and be voices of hope.

Last Word: How will I be the church in the next normal?

Matthew 13 tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven which a woman places in flour, until it was all leavened. How will God use me to be a leaven for the Kingdom in the days and week ahead?

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ