

“The Healing of Our Negativity”
Lenten Service, March 3, 2010
Pastor Tim Eighmy

Please read Bible text: John 18:28-40

I loved my mother dearly, but she was a person who could never accept a compliment. I would say to her, “Mom, this meal was great.” And she would say, “Oh, there was too much salt in it.” or “It just didn’t come out right.”

Or I would say, “That’s a pretty dress you’re wearing.” And she would say, “Oh this old thing? I just don’t have anything nice in my closet.”

Or I would say, “I like your hair-do.” And she would say, “I just can’t control it right.”

And I would have to say, “No, no, really,” before she would even begin to grudgingly accept a compliment.

This was something that I grew up with. And it took me several years as an adult to learn how to simply say, “Thank you,” when I was given a compliment without trying to argue the compliment away.

But today we live in a culture where cynicism is common place. People are ruder, more paranoid, more distrusting of one another – we are often assuming and saying the worse about one another.

The recent situation in Haiti is an example. I often hear reports about how thousands of people are being fed, receiving medical care, and getting fresh water because of the relief efforts of churches and other charities.

But what do I often hear people say in response? “Well, there are still thousands of people who we haven’t reached yet – who may never get help. I don’t know how we can possibly help everyone. We are just wasting our resources in helping those people when we have so many suffering right here in Nebraska.”

Did you hear me say, how much has been accomplished already? We can’t seem to let the good gifts of God stand on their own; we focus on the faults.

I remember something that a pastor once said to me about his congregation. He said, “There are a few people in my church who always see the negative. Someone might volunteer to paint an entire room in the church building and pay for the paint themselves. They’ll do a beautiful job, but in one corner there might be a little place where they messed things up. Instead of seeing the rest of the beautiful paint

job, the critics will only point out the one place where that person messed up and complain about it to everyone around.”

When we can't see the good that God has created around us because of our own negativity—that is a problem. I think that the church especially is hurting because of our negative interpretations.

I've heard people say, “Well, I just don't understand why we don't do this ministry or do that ministry. We used to do things like that all the time.”

However, when we ask people to volunteer to head up that particular ministry or when we try to get more people involved, we may have difficulty finding volunteers. Many are afraid they might do something wrong and then everybody will be mad at them.

And so many ministries have fallen apart before they even got started because of our fear and negative attitudes.

Another example: someone will come up to me and ask about how another church's teachings are different than ours. Before I get a chance to answer, they will shut me off by saying, “Oh, I guess it doesn't make that much difference. It's all semantics anyway.”

Before I even get a chance to explain or help them understand, they have negatively given up on the conversation before it even got started.

For eight years before I came to North Platte, I served as a university campus pastor up in Minot, North Dakota. I routinely heard young adults tell me how they stopped going to church because they thought that “their home congregations were just mean people who had nothing good to say about anybody.”

I remember counseling a young woman who was a lesbian who told me how she went to a gay support group and told them how she was trying to be a faithful Christian, as well as being open about her sexuality. She said that everyone laughed at her and asked, “Why do you want to be a Christian? Don’t you know that Christians hate us?”

Our negative attitudes are being heard loud and clear by people outside of the church. In fact, they are hearing our negativity more than they are *the good news of God’s grace revealed through Jesus Christ.*

I have to wonder if, with our negative attitudes, we are treating Jesus in the same way as the high priests and Pontius Pilate treated him in our Gospel reading!

When Jesus was on trial, everything he said was turned against him. The high priests – Caiaphas and Annas – had already decided that Jesus must die. They were convinced that he was simply trying to start a riot. Never mind what his message was, Jesus was obviously too good to be true.

But the Passover Festival had arrived and it was against Jewish Law to put people to death during such a sacred festival. So they decided to convince the Romans to put Jesus to death.

They accused Jesus of treason. After all, people were saying he was the Messiah – a king. And that would undermine the authority of the Roman emperor.

Pontius Pilate didn't trust the Jewish leadership. But he also thought that Jesus must have been guilty of something; nobody is completely innocent. He asked Jesus if he was a king.

And when Jesus tried to explain that he was talking about a spiritual kingdom, Pilate turned his words against him and said, "So you are a king."

Then Jesus said that he was simply trying to *proclaim the truth*. That is when Pilate scoffed, "What is truth?"

In Roman culture, there were many religions and many spiritual philosophies. The Romans didn't believe. Pilate just saw Jesus as a fool for actually believing his own rhetoric.

We can be sure that in the midst of this negativity lay a lot of paranoia and broken relationships.

Jesus took that upon himself and died with it on the cross.

Now with a new life in Christ Jesus, we can afford to be a little bit more gracious to one another. We can afford to notice the goodness around us and tell people what they are doing well. We can afford to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ so the world may know that there really is hope in our lives.

Amen.