

## THE GOSPEL MESSAGE\*

*\*based on a presentation given at a meeting to explain the purpose of Station 20 West, a multi purpose project, health clinics, dental clinic, library, good food and child hunger education operation, legal advice office, nutritious food store to be sited in a core neighbourhood of the city of Saskatoon where such services have been neglected. April 4, 2008.*

The words “gospel message” should refer to the words of Jesus as related in the four gospels. It often refers to many parts of both the Old and New Testament. It is important to keep in mind that the word “gospel” implies “the good news”.

To put this in a time frame is first to note that Jesus was a Jew with his learning coming from the Old Testament, the history of the Jewish people. This history is replete with wars and defeats and exiles and suffering. Hardly good news.

Yet God is always with his people. Thus in the book of Lamentations, we read

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. When all the prisoners of the land are crushed underfoot, when human rights are perverted, when one’s case subverted, does the Lord not see it?”

3 22-24, 34 -36

As we recall, the Jewish people strayed and the above excerpt must have been one of these times. They and we were given a second chance by God sending His only Son to redeem, to save us. This is to be achieved by learning from Jesus that our love for God is to be shown by loving our neighbour.

Remember that many members of the Roman Catholic faith see themselves as members of a sacramental church, as indeed do others outside our faith. As such we are fed by the Body of Christ in a church building only to return again and again, usually one week later, to be fed again. We are also fed these days by a vital part of the liturgy, the liturgy of the Word, which probably takes as much time as the liturgy of the Eucharist. As literate people, these days we can hear, learn from and later read the Word being broken open.

So the basic words of the Gospel for someone directed to love her or his neighbour are found in Matthew 25, the eight beatitudes – visiting the sick, the people in prison and much more. Today however, I would suggest that Luke’s beatitudes are equally relevant. Granted there are only four, but accompanying them are four woes, in particular this one, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have had your fill.”

I would like to divert to an interpretation of the Bible that arose in the time of the Reformation among some non Catholic people. They would be imbued by the early events, first of Abraham and then of Moses. Abraham as you know was promised by God that all of his descendants would be blessed with riches, while Moses was told he and his people would be led into the promised land.

Those who were much taken by these promises made in the very early days of the history of the Jewish people forgot that God was, as I have just mentioned, completely upset by the ways of the Jewish people. This is worth repeating for faced with the puzzle of knowing if they, Reformation Christians, were to attain heaven reasoned that they should be favoured people. And how was God going to show them favour on this earth? It was then as it is now. To be showered with riches. They would be God's chosen ones.

Note however the corollary. Who would be going to hell? The poor. Furthermore there was no need to help them to have a better life on earth, but they should be helped to prepare to attain the after life. By extension, the priority is to save the soul rather than save the body. The term developed from Reformation times on was predestination. Today for non believer or the one who can make a financial success of himself or herself, it is described in the term "economic determinism".

We see this being played out in the political and economic arena, and in our very materialistic world. And also in many people who are reluctant to pay taxation, for this is really a redistribution of wealth to aid the poor through cash benefits and programs, that involve buildings and equipment and staff, mainly in education and health.

But what can we do, what can I do? By example as a witness, a humble and inadequate one often, to hold the governments, and sometimes the church accountable. Methods exists, from education to advocacy, from speaking out to marching, from prayer to worship (this should come first), yes, even to civil disobedience. In all this we must be also make our presence known. We must stand with those who are powerless, abandoned and less fortunate.

I end with this haunting statement, a statement that should haunt everyone. It is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. A book as thick as a telephone book, not at all like the thin Catechism of long ago, where the simple answers to simple questions had to be learned. The haunting statement comes under the heading of Social Justice, which is a subheading to the section on the seventh commandment, "You shall not steal."

An early saint John Chrysostum said this, "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and to deprive them of life."

Most of you here this evening are here to see that this does not happen.