

Pastors Pen – Pr. Jack

As you cannot help but know, there have been a number of protests of one sort or another since the inauguration of our President. Though I don't always agree with some of the positions taken, I support one's right, a people's right to protest, march, etc. ... Such actions often call attention to injustices propagated against God's people. Often, too, they call attention to our own inaction in or complacency about God's earthly Kingdom. For example, it was through the protests and marches of concerned citizens that women were granted the right to vote and God's children not of northern European descent were granted rights equal to those who are. I will readily admit, however, I don't understand the violence and destructiveness into which some marches/protests devolve. I view such behavior as counter-productive at best to any cause – "fer or agin."

As you read this we have heard and will continue to read and hear Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" from Matthew's gospel during our Sunday worship services. The first offering was the passage referred to in religious circles as the "Beatitudes." (Matt. 5:1-12) I prefer translations that read "blessed ..." to those that read, "happy ..." as I believe "happy" refers to an emotional response, where "blessed" refers to God's gift to God's people. Feel free to protest if you must.

Author Karoline Lewis wrote once that the gospel is a word of protest. I had to read that more than twice, but I can now agree. In this time and place, our time and place, we cannot afford long to forget this. As in all times and in all places, Jesus was a man who stood up against violence, oppression, discrimination and exclusion of people. Jesus championed the cause of the unfortunate, the un-powerful, the un-wealthy, the un-represented. In effect Jesus stood and said, "No more!" No more of this. And he said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" promising, "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" He continued, "*Blessed are those who mourn,*" promising, "*they will be comforted.*" And, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*" promising, "*they will be filled.*" These Beatitudes are not just blessings, though, they are a call to action.

They point out who Jesus is. He may not be the Jesus we want. In fact he may rub us the wrong way from time to time. Jesus may reveal the truth about us. Jesus may remind us what God's Kingdom of heaven and on earth is all about – maybe even at a most inconvenient time. The Beatitudes are in many ways Jesus' call to action to his disciples.

It is Jesus' call to us to make God present and visible in a world that too often tries to silence those who speak the truth and cry out for it. I read a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. writing from a jail cell in Birmingham, AL, "*There was a time when the church was very powerful, in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In this day, the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society – If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning.*"

When our hope for the future is dimmed, when we may believe what we do and what we say and what we believe doesn't make a difference, our calling as disciples of our Savior Jesus Christ, our hunger and thirst for righteousness does matter.

Pr. Jack