

Sermon Sunday, March 10, 2013

Part I

-We have heard a lot in the last week or so about bullying with the Safer Schools Bill that has come before the Manitoba Legislature.

-But people are bullied for a lot of reasons; how they look (clothes one wears, ones size), where they live, their wealth, sexual orientation or perceived orientation and anything that will set someone apart from the crowd.

-Bullying can affect someone for their whole life and can colour the way that we see ourselves.

- Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians was written to a community of believers that had a number of problems that Paul desired to address.

-A major problem that Paul is addressing in both Corinthian letters is the problem of spiritual pride that had led some in the community to pervert Paul's teaching about spiritual freedom.

-The tendency toward spiritual pride resulting from how they conceptualized human beings and the lack of clearly conceived Christian ethics worked together to allow a lifestyle that Paul felt did not represent in practice what it meant to bear the name Christian.

-Paul believed that one needed to live that life of a Christian in all aspects of one's life and this is what he was addressing in these letters.

-But who was Paul? Paul was originally Saul. Saul was trained as a Pharisee, a member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic Law in both its oral and written form.

-Saul was bound and determined to persecute the Christians, he himself was a bully of those who did not believe the same that he himself was raised to believe.

Part II

-But Saul changed and on the road to Damascus became Paul and he went on to become one of the most influential figures in the New Testament. Dr. Thomas Constable from the Dallas Theological Seminary, in relation to our reading this morning states the following; "Since his conversion, Paul had stopped making superficial personal judgments based only on external appearances. Previously he had looked at people on a strictly physical basis, in terms of their ethnicity rather than their spiritual status, which is the merely human perspective."

-Our challenge in today's world is to get past all of those labels; all of those judgments based on the external and see ourselves as God sees us; to see ourselves through the eyes of love.

-But we are challenged to not only see ourselves through the eyes of love, we are challenged to see others through the eyes of love.

-Ann Naylor, an instructor at the Centre for Christian Studies, in her reflection of bullying quotes God's response to Moses in Exodus 3:14; "I am that I am."

-It is interesting that God does not use labels and yet we, being made in God's image label others, we do not see others through the eyes of love, as an embodiment of God, we see them as labels, placed into tiny boxes.

-We are challenged to not think like the Corinthians; that we could do whatever we want as long as we come to church. We are challenged to not participate in those structures in society where institutional injustices are housed. We are challenged to look at all we meet through the eyes of love.

-Ma Zu who is considered to be a Chinese Goddess said; "Be a witness, not a judge. Focus on yourself, not on others. Listen to your heart, not to the crowd."

-Let us see ourselves as God sees, as something to be loved and pass that love on to those around us. Let us stand as an alternative to those who would pass judgment on others, those who would bully those considered to be different, those considered to be "others."