

RIC Sunday on the 4th Sunday of Epiphany January 31, 2016
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer
Ruth 1: 7-18
Psalm 117
2 Corinthians 3: 1b-6; 17-18
Gospel Reading—Mark 7: 24-30

The Demon Named “Labels”



This is Clark David Wayne Spinner. He surprised us all by coming three weeks before we planned. Emily, our daughter, kept saying I planned to get ready this week. Here is my list of things I had planned to do to be all ready for his birth. And David and I were saying the same thing. This week we would get our bags packed and waiting for when we got the call.

Well, the call came—at 6:30 on Sunday morning. Really? Doesn't the little guy know his grandma is a pastor? Not what we had planned. We threw some things in a suitcase. I didn't even know what I brought. Needless to say, I did make a trip to the store for some necessities when we got to Muncie.

People plan. That's what we do. But we aren't in charge. God is. We were shone that pretty plainly with our grandson's birth. Why are we surprised when things don't turn out as planned? Like when these little guys are born, we immediately start envisioning their lives, who they will be, what they will do, so on and so on, plan, plan, plan..

Then we find out they have their own wants, desires, needs; they are who God created them to be...not according to our plan, but according to God's ultimate plan for God's creation. Our Psalm 117 reminds us that God created us each individually and God's love for us is forever. Here is how the Message Bible puts it.

Praise GOD, everybody!
Applaud GOD, all people!
His love has taken over our lives;

GOD's faithful ways are eternal.
Hallelujah!

We are all born according to God's plan. And we are all loved from the moon and back by our creator. God's plan is for us all to be different, like our scripture from last Sunday says in 1 Corinthians 12, we are each born with specific gifts for the use in the body of Christ. We are created differently to support each other. So what happens? If diversity is God's plan, why are we even having this conversation about welcoming everyone...why is being a different gender orientation even an issue? Or a different color, or a different religion, or a different financial situation? Or any other way we are different from each other? Why are we a Reconciling in Christ congregation?

It's that demon. That demon in the Gospel for today. The demon—the demon that lurked then, the one that kept Jesus from openly welcome this woman to the table, is the same one lurking now, causing many to be shunned from the table. The name of that demon is label. This demon gets in our head and tries to convince us that human labels are what defines us. Not so.

We are about to watch a video that has been going strong on the internet. On this day that we celebrate our part in the Reconciling Works Ministry as a certified Reconciling in Christ congregation, lets watch this video carefully. It doesn't speak specifically to the labeling of LGBT individuals, but they are there. The message is clear. Labels are not God's plan.
(*you can watch the video at this site*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0qD2K2RWkc>

That Syrophenician Woman in our Gospel lesson, came to Jesus because a demon, or some kind of illness was ravishing her little girl. And when she came she was met with another demon, one nurtured by society. It was the demon named Labels. Jesus lived by the rules of the Jewish people. Jesus tried to do what was right. So he told her, "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*" This brave woman opened the Jesus eyes. She was not denying her label, what she was denying is that she was not worthy of at least some "left over" compassion. Her words to Jesus opened his heart in a deeper wider way to just how inclusive God's love is. Jesus changed in midstream and his overflowing love took care of the demon making her child ill, and the demon that labeled her.

Just like Jesus, we are to be God's love letters to the world. Through the Holy Spirit's work in us, as God's letters to the world, we can be open to God's label-less love and spread the word in ways all can see God's compassion as clearly as if it were written on our foreheads.

In fact, maybe that is what we do when we remember our baptism and put the mark of the cross on our foreheads. We are signed sealed and delivered to send the message of God's love for every single human being on the face of the earth. Let's close this celebration by listening to our welcoming statement. You can follow along in your bulletin on the first page or on the screen.

You are welcome at Grace & Peace Lutheran Church, a Reconciling in Christ congregation of the ELCA. Christ is our center and we live in grateful response to God's love and grace. We seek to celebrate the image of God in all people, including every race, sex, age, creed, national

origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital and familial status, physical and mental ability, socioeconomic situation and political affiliation. Please join with us in nurturing meaningful relationships, and sharing our collective gifts in response to the world's deep hunger for hope, love, grace, justice and peace.

This is God's Plan.

All God's People say, "Amen"