

### 1.22.09 Trans "Jesus, Justice & Jazz"

- Who can forget the video clips of helicopters hoisting people in baskets off the roofs of their flooded homes?
- And then there were the unforgettable pictures of rescuers going in boats from house to house to take people to safety, or else using spray paint to mark the houses where bodies would later need to be recovered
- Finally there was the Superdome, that huge football stadium packed with people taking refuge – chaos within the dome, but outside, the dome was surrounded by floodwater and floating bodies. The Superdome became a haunting and painful symbol rather than a place of refuge for the survivors
- Hurricane Katrina inflicted widespread devastation on New Orleans almost four years ago, but in the aftermath of Katrina some pretty ugly truths were exposed
  - Incompetence was widespread
  - Poor planning made the city and much of the gulf coast an accident waiting to happen
  - Local and statewide corruption made New Orleans a poster-child for dysfunctional government
  - And as soon as the floodwaters receded, the bickering began even while hundreds and thousands of people were homeless
- For a long time even before Katrina, New Orleans has had two faces
  - One was the tourist face that outsiders see – the Mardi Gras, the French Quarter, the great food, and the wonderful jazz
  - The other face was the face of poverty – one of the poorest cities in the nation, a place with few resources, poor education, high unemployment, violence, and whole neighborhoods where people were barely living from day to day – and that was before Katrina
- The tourist area was spared much of the flooding, but many of the neighborhoods are still filled with abandoned houses, and as we saw two years ago when we went to Camp Noah, there were lots of homeless people sleeping in the shadows – even in the tourist area
- This is the city in which over 30,000 Lutheran teenagers will gather this summer for the churchwide youth gathering

- Parents and teens, from my description, you may be a little scared or uncomfortable about going there
- But I have to say – the people of New Orleans need you
- And frankly, they need "Jesus, Justice and Jazz" – the theme of our churchwide youth gathering
- But let me be clear – you are NOT taking Jesus there with you!
  - Jesus is already there
  - Jesus is there because our crucified and risen Christ has promised to be present wherever people suffer, and New Orleans even before the flood, surely fit the bill
  - Jesus is there because Jesus promised to be present whenever two or more people gather in his name, and Christians have been gathering in New Orleans for centuries now
  - Jesus is there because Christ has promised to be present together with the water of Baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and in the Gospel Word proclaimed – and there have been communities of faith calling and making disciples through God's bath, meal, and word
- So when our young people go to "Jesus, Justice and Jazz" this July, they will not take Jesus – they will go to meet Jesus who is both here and there, and the young people will go and tell the people of New Orleans that they haven't been forgotten by the Lutheran Church
- Justice will also be an important part of the youth gathering
  - But why is God, and why are God's people, so concerned about justice?
  - For Christians, justice is about more than the law – justice is more than about treating others fairly and compassionately
  - For Christians, justice is rooted in Jesus Christ himself
    - In the gospel for today, Jesus was transformed, and his heavenly nature was revealed to the disciples
    - But even more important than Jesus' dazzling white clothes, was the message that the heavenly voice declared to the disciples: "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"
  - In the transfiguration, Jesus was shown to the disciples to be no one less than the Son of God – and then Jesus, the Son of God, went to Jerusalem to be crucified and raised

- Jesus, the Son of God, came and was crucified and raised to bring forgiveness and life to us
- Indeed, the death and resurrection of the Son of God is God's wonderful declaration that God loves all humanity this much [arms open and spread]
- And therefore this gracious, crucified and risen, loving-God also demonstrates how much each and every person is now valued by God
  - To act unjustly, therefore, is to disrespect another person for whom Christ went to the trouble to die and be raised
  - To fail to challenge injustice, is to allow the brokenness of creation to disrespect the sacrificial gift of the Son of God
  - To help rebuild homes, and to listen to the stories of those who are still desperately trying to recover, will be our young people's ministry of justice lived out with people for whom God cares so very much
- And what about Jazz?
  - New Orleans is known for its Jazz, and our young people will sing lots of songs in and out of worship at the gathering
  - But New Orleans is also known for its parades
  - Of course the Marti Gras is the most famous New Orleans parade, but that's just for a few days each year – there's another parade that takes place almost every day of the year
  - Pull out your red hymnal and turn to page 271 [Evangelical Lutheran Worship]. . . . – the top drawing is a picture of anointing the sick, the bottom picture represents a marriage, and the middle picture? It represents a New Orleans funeral procession
    - It's a New Orleans tradition to march the casket and the family and friends accompanied by a small brass group, slowly – ever so slowly down to the grave
    - But then to march back from the grave, with bright Dixieland jazz and dancing
    - Why the change from somber march to joyful dance? Because in New Orleans style, the jazz tells us that it's never only about death – for Christians, our journey is always also about resurrection!

- "Jesus, Justice and Jazz" – we celebrate it today, some of our young people will experience it in New Orleans this July, but all of us are called to live out "Jesus, Justice and Jazz" in life, in death, and in life again.