

The last couple weeks, I've been asked by a lot of people to come and talk about some of the things happening in small towns in rural communities. Some of the things that we see happening in our lives that a lot of people don't recognize are still going on today. Like, they don't realize that there are a lot of communities that don't have internet. They just take it for granted; they do. They don't understand that there's a lot of communities that don't have cell phone coverage, and so getting landlines is even hard for them. They don't recognize that there are places that don't have drinkable water in our communities. Or in our case water that we can't wash our laundry in, which I still don't understand that one.

But it's an opportunity that's out there. And people keep asking how and why that is. So they want me to come and talk to them. So, I'm in this meeting last Tuesday, and I'm talking about some of the different concerns that we have. And right in the middle of my presentation, this guy stops me. He says, Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, wait! Wait, did you just say this? And I said, no, He's like, oh well, this is what we're going to talk about now, and he just takes over my presentation. And he's just going on, and he's going on. And what he's talking about is that instead of rural communities coming together to make change for themselves, he starts talking about how we need to keep living a traditional life. How we need to follow the paths that's been laid out over time. And he's going on; he's going on. And I stop him. And I'm, like, okay, so you want us to keep doing what we've been doing for 200 years.

He says, yes. I ask why. He says, well, because it's working. Explain to me how it's working. Explain to me how people without water means that it's working. Explain to me how any of this is helpful. We see churches that are shrinking because people aren't going anymore. We see people having difficulties in communities. We see plants shutting down. How is staying with what we've been doing for 200 years working? And he says, well, it's working for me. I'm, like, oh, so, that's the important thing here. We don't want to change because it's working for you. Well, this is how it's always been. This is how it needs to stay. We have that thought so many times, right? We stay with the traditional aspects of life, because it's what we know, it's what we're comfortable with. And we don't recognize that by doing that, sometimes, we're isolating people who really need help. We're stopping people from getting the resources and the help they need.

In today's reading, Luke is telling us about a discussion that happened between the Pharisees and between Peter and Paul and James. Not one of the apostles, James, but Jesus's brother James. And they're talking about the church and the Pharisees, even though they support Jesus. And they believe that he was the Messiah, and they're supporting the new church. They think that everything needs to stay the old way. They think that everybody needs to live the old ways, the old Jewish traditions, and then if they don't do that, they can't be saved.

That's a hard thing. It's a hard thing for all of them to wrap their heads around because they want to reach out to everybody. So, if you do this, then all the Gentiles have to start living that life. They have to go through everything that they did that the Jews went through. And if they did that, is that right to the Jews who went through before them? Is it fair to the Gentiles who are now converting? Is it fair to anybody? A handful of people are making a decision for a big group because they don't want to change. They don't have to change; what they're doing

works for them. But that doesn't work for everybody else. It doesn't work for the Gentiles who are becoming Christians for what's happening there.

In our world today, people do not realize that sometimes by forcing their own views upon people, it's worse than if they don't do anything to things that happened for them, will work well for everyone, like this gentleman. He believes that everything he does works well for everyone, but it doesn't. It doesn't fit in our model. It doesn't fit in our community, and he doesn't realize that even though he's trying to help us, he's trying to be supportive, he's actually minimalizing us. He's being discriminatory towards us. And not just us, but others in our situation. He can't see that the world might exist on two different levels. You can't see that what works for some people doesn't work for others. And he can't see that by him, forcing others to do what he wants, he's being discriminatory towards them. We don't recognize sometimes that some of the things that we say are discriminatory. We don't recognize the fact because it's been a part of our lives, all of our lives.

I remember when I went off to college, my grandma Duling gave me a whole list of things to do and to not do, cuz, you know, Grandma was always very helpful. And her list of things to do and her things to not do were actually the same list. The only difference was, you would put a word in front of one. She would put an adjective in front of certain words. She said make sure you hang out with the right people. Make sure you help the right people. She didn't mean it in a way in her mind that was isolating people off. She meant to help people that needed help. She didn't think about the rest of it.

I know last week I made a comment that I didn't realize until after it came out of my mouth that somebody could think of it as being a derogatory comment to them. I didn't think about it at all. I just assumed that my world was the same world that everybody else was living in, and it's hard because I get that wake-up call every once in a while. I can sit here and point fingers that this one guy and I do it frequently because we fight all the time. And I can tell him he's wrong, and that he's doing these things against people in our situation. And then I have to look at myself in the mirror and say, well, wait a minute. Now, I'm going against him. I'm being just as bigotry towards the big churches towards the big communities because they have resources. It's a hard thing to wake up and look at and see yourself and say, I'm a racist on this level, or I'm a bigot on this level.

We all have the same goal. We all want what's best for everybody, and sometimes we take our own ideas too far. It's hard to put ourselves and other people's shoes. Sometimes, it's hard to recognize the life that they're living because we're so comfortable in our own, we forget there are people that are living lives that are different from ours. We forget there are people that look like they're doing well and in actuality or not. We forget that it's easy for us to sit here and make ideas and decisions for other people without talking to them, without hearing their voice, without knowing what their needs really are. And that's hard. We don't mean to do that. None of us do, but every once in a while we just kind of need to take a step back, especially me, and think about hearing them for who they are, and not just seeing them for who I think they are.

Let us pray.