

Thank you, Mark and Rebecca, for the generous invitation and for lending the pulpit to your Lutheran partner today -- just as we're wrapping up the 500th year of the Reformation -- not a bad time to have a Lutheran over.

Well, we live in a time of deep divisions, that's duh, it's no brainer, right? We're familiar with that every day. In the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we have enjoyed a full communion relationship for some years now. It doesn't always come up unless we happen to be engaged in a joint ministry, which we are at Agape House at San Diego State University. We have been enjoying ecumenical ministry since 1952, first at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church. Since 1962 when St. Dunstan's moved, we've been in a little brown house, right across from the Student Union and the transit center. Amazing that in the 50s somebody had a vision to plant a ministry right there at the hub of one of the most diverse universities in the United States. It is a joy to be in ministry there, and thank you for your partnership through the diocese.

Many students, when they first encounter us, tell me that are ... whether they grew up Episcopalian or Lutheran, will tell me that they're, or not, will tell me that they're impressed to see two churches in ministry together, because they're used to seeing churches competing, vying for dominance. They see this as a refreshing sign of health and openness. Even for unchurched people, or for people who are distant from the church, it sends a powerful message, which surprised me, frankly, because most of the students side me don't really care about denominational identity.

God has done some interesting surprising things among us. I've been there nine years. When I first came SDSU was more of a party school and now it's getting a lot more studious. Now you might have heard over 100,000 applicants for 6000 spots. I don't think I could have gotten into SDSU at that time of my life. It's a place of challenge, but some challenges I did not expect. We have become acquainted with more students who are very much at the edge. Most of our students are first generation college students and we know that 4000 students at SDSU grew up in poverty.

Through these encounters, God is making us bold to envision a new campus ministry center on our site that will include affordable housing for up to 50 students in a faith community setting. Some are presently homeless

or skipping meals to stay in school. The cost of housing and San Diego means we are losing a lot of our students and new grads, but we need their presence and their talents to remain a vital city as much as a vital church. So what does all this have to do with Jesus' teaching for us today?

Well, to me to start with, today's opening of doors and cooperation as church is critically important to embody what Jesus means by, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant." There are ways that we serve one another, providing for ministry across the diocese: two ministries who are seedbeds for new leaders in the church and the society who take their discipleship of Jesus out into the world. I think we can help turn each other inside out as Jesus seems to be trying to do with his disciples as we serve and build up one another rather than competing or dominating against each other. We're being faithful to that counter-cultural core of the gospel, that God has come in human form to set us free from fear, from hatred, and from oppression so that we can live in love and trust and eternal communion that begins now, that it's not merely something that we're waiting and longing for, but we can taste now as we gather for Holy Communion.

We taste God's reign on earth and embody that in this world. It seems that right from the beginning, at least in Mark's gospel, we hear clearly the disciples are often confused about what Jesus is about. Here in chapter 10 he has just told them for the third time that the authorities will not only oppose him, he will be arrested. He will be tortured to death and only then rise again. Perhaps this is so inscrutable they think it's one of his parables or it's him going off metaphorically. Maybe they just set it aside, but immediately James and John want to share Jesus' glory on seats of power. They want the political favors. You get elected president, you appoint your friends on the Cabinet. That's how the world works.

Were they even listening to Jesus just then where Jesus is clearly identifying with Isaiah's suffering servant that we heard about in the first reading, the struggle for God's justice? James and John want a seat of glory. They want to admire Jesus, sort of like a mascot on a pedestal, but not to follow him in the struggle for mercy and justice. I don't even have to get into our present political and economic debacle for you to recognize this dynamic. It's been playing itself out for millennia.

The challenges of being church today in a secularizing culture are daunting. Many students, as I say, are not raised in the church. Even most who were have distanced themselves because they perceive church as irrelevant. It's good for children and elders. But what does it have to do with me and my life direction? Frankly, I grew up in the church. Every Sunday family ... when I asked my mom, "Do we have to go every Sunday?" She's like, "Yes. We are people who go to church." I had not considered, even in college, that God might be up to something with my life. So I went off in search of the American dream for me and mine. It wasn't until I was just about to launch as a senior that I realized maybe there's more.

It was Campus Ministry late, because I was so busy, it was late in my college days that reawakened a sense of call, a possibility that God might guide me on a different path, one that was a little bit unpredictable as opposed to my career plan. Church is being humbled these days in many ways. Often we're struggling to regain our footing. The Agape House, while we might be unconventional, we're no exception to that. We're always having to adjust to new waves of people sort of at the cutting edge of cultural shifts as well. Now we find that we are the only mainline Campus Ministry remaining at San Diego State University.

We used to have Episcopal student workers but funding for that was eliminated by the diocese several years ago. We're finding new possibilities with partnering with parishes where students can find an experience of welcome and to celebrate their gifts and to have an opportunity to lead in ministry. We see ourselves as a seedbed for leaders, showing students church that is thoroughly engaged with their lives in tangible ways. Maybe that's the disconnect is that we have tended to split the spiritual from the material in our lives. I mean meals, to sit down at a table and eat together, for some of these students, it's the first time that they've done this on a regular basis 'cause they didn't grow up eating a family meal together.

They're around a table. People find support. They realize that they're not alone in this journey, that their life and their studies are not just about them. It's opening up new possibilities. Many are awakening to a divine calling to serve Christ. Through those conversations with students who are sleeping in their cars, other students realized, "Wow. There's a lot of different stuff happening in this world." They realized

that the way that they were raised or the environment they grew up in is not the way everyone lives and they wonder about it. There at this table the questions are more important sometimes than the answers and they begin to learn to listen.

Many we find out are traumatized by poverty and by religion. They find out they have that in common with Jesus. He was also traumatized by the temple and an oppressive system. That trauma ended in his death because he brought the power of God close to the poor, the sick, the outcast, the center, he dared to say that God is present among us in human flesh. He flipped the money tables upside down and turned the religion inside out, because you recognize God's power at work in the lost and the least, the expendables of society.

We at Agape House got turned inside out about five years ago as Jesus sneaked up on us at our Wednesday dinner and shared these stories with us. One by one, students told me about not having a meal in three or four days. They were skipping meals to save money. Then we found out that 400 students each semester are thrown off the meal plan for nonpayment. This was not the college experience that I had. I wasn't really prepared for this. I thought these would be outliers until we found out that there were hundreds. Now thanks to a statewide study, we find out there about 2800 SDSU students in insecure housing, meaning that they sleep somewhere that's either unsafe or unreliable.

We're a little bit overwhelmed, frankly, by this as we have every week a new student facing eviction dropping into Agape House, not because they think we might have a quick answer or solution, but because they heard that we care. They heard that we walk with each other in the wholeness of our lives. Last week, one of our former staff, other thing we didn't expect, she's working on her master's social work degree now. She came in for groceries from our food pantry. Now she realizes she needs two month's rent because her budget in grad school was to get by on food stamps, but she's ineligible because her internship is unpaid work. Figure that out. She can't get food stamps because she's working for free for the sake of the community. These are things we must figure out.

As these students brought their stories together, Patricia is one of those who went from vulnerability to leadership, where she and other students shared their

stories with officials with media with City Council. A state hearing was held on our campus to investigate this. This opened up the possibility of mass food distributions, far beyond our capacity and our little house. The students catalyzed a shift and awakening, where now we realize all across the country that many students when they leave home are struggling. We still keep our little food pantry going for that personal touch and more holistic approach.

All this experience was a lesson that students have the energy, the will, and the ability to change society for the better. Now, of course, handing out food does not end poverty, but it has made students realize that they're not alone in their struggle. This experience kindles a flame of the spirit to reconnect them to other people's journeys in more conscious ways, to free their hearts and hands that God's will be done on earth as in heaven as we pray with Jesus' words.

Well, it sounds great, right? But the challenge is in how Isaiah describes God's suffering servant. What happens when God's prophet confronts the system? Jesus found out in his body how dangerous that is. Today's Hebrew reading doubles down on this, saying obedience to God is perfected through suffering. Somehow God's power is paradoxical and the inverse of worldly power. Paul writes, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. And God's weakness is stronger than human strength." "Power is made perfect in weakness," Paul says, "So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me," he says.

We found out that our weakness, our inability to serve this overwhelming need was breaking us open to be about God's purpose in a new way, to find out that the strength of church is God's strength, not our own, that our weakness can be a way for God's power to work, especially through those on the edge or even outside the church. I think that's what it took for me to get it. I think I was confused like James and John. I had to have this shown to me in the flesh of people in front of me and their stories that God often comes to us as the other, the stranger, the thousands of refugees headed this way. Will we post guards at the wall to keep them out, or will we welcome them as sister and brother and friend? Young people are watching us to see what we do. Those who've had any experience of Jesus see him calling us closer to these little ones, as Jesus calls his friends.

Now with thousands of college students on the edge, right here in one of the world's wealthiest cities, we must not eat the seed corn for next year's harvest. Forgive the farming image. I grew up in the Midwest among farmers where generations passed on the wisdom that a harvest cannot come if we eat the seed instead of plant it. Campus Ministry's not a luxury, but it's a seedbed for leaders, where we water seeds that you have planted. As we do that, we show them Jesus' way, as it says in Acts, that turns the world upside down. That's what Jesus is up to. He's inverting the systems. He's turning them inside out, including the church where, when we engaged, we ourselves as church are renewed in faith and the possibility that we can trust God's power more than our own.

You are embodying that. You are embodying God's gracious welcome in this place, and as you partner in ministry with others. Thank you. As we wonder about how we're engaging new generations of leaders, Christ's love is overflowing to us through them. That also brings us joy as Christ draws us nearer to his little ones. God bless you in your life and service in Jesus name.

Amen.