

Who has been impacted by campus ministry?

I believe that campus ministry is essential in the lives of our young folks, and will make a difference for the rest of their lives. That time in college is transformational – we need to support those ministry settings as a place for our kids to have the support they need in those years of figuring out life on their own. I would argue that college may be a better time for confirmation classes, than in 7th and 8th grade – because in your early twenties you start to see the world differently – and start to understand what you value.

Campus ministry was life changing for me. It came at time in my life where I wanted to be formed in faith, figure out my life goals and direction, but also had no idea what the heck I was doing. I didn't feel like I had anywhere to fit in at La Crosse.

Campus ministry and the relationships that were built there are what kept me from quitting school. It helped me to sort out the positives of God, when I had been fed a lot of negative that I believed as truth.

At college, I had some friends, who I trusted, but they justified their hate by using God. It was hate against LGBT community. Hate against Lutherans. Sexism towards women.

Hate against anyone who didn't believe the way they did. They treated me harshly. They kept saying they were trying to teach me God's way – but had twisted it around so much that it really was no longer God. But I was young – naïve – and I got caught in it, with little way out.

What they said didn't feel right, but I had no idea where to turn. I searched and searched, and came upon the Lutheran Campus Ministry house. They were a community that saved me.

Why is God ever used to justify hate, bad behavior, violence?

Why do we need to find reason to justify the sin we commit?

The story of Joseph is a perfect example. Joseph is an obnoxious jerk. Snobby, self-righteous, arrogant. The most loved, the favorite, and he knew it. I may be a bit bitter, since I was Joseph's brother Asher for two runs of the musical – Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. But Joseph is full of himself, that dreamer. Even the music, which I have been singing all week, highlights Joseph's superiority.

Ugh – no wonder the brothers wanted to kill him.

But does Joseph's arrogance warrant death? Of course not.

Fear and jealousy drive the brothers, negative emotions warp our moral decisions. Fear is what dictates our worst behavior as well.

What do you try and justify? Either with God...or with fear...or reasoning?

Football...oh, it's just a game, entertainment.

Alcoholism...just one more drink.

Adultery...it's not hurting anyone.

Addiction...I have control.

Hate...but she started it, it's not my fault, they deserve it.

Killing... it's just self-defense, God told me to, I was protecting so and so, I thought I was doing the right thing.

There is NOTHING that will justify our behavior.

Nothing. Not if we take Jesus' seriously.

Jesus doesn't make exceptions to the command to love God, love self, and love others. Why do we?

Why do we try and explain away our mistakes to make us feel vindicated?
Or to profit from it the way Joseph's brothers did?

We don't like when our idols are criticized, and we want to justify our behavior. We don't like it when patriotism is challenged. We are offended to hear that God and Country does not belong in the same breath.

We huff when our worship of football is revealed.
Or when our love of money is admitted. We are
defensive when our sin is confronted.

But we need to name it. Because that is when we will change. God can and does forgive without confession. But we change when light is shed on the dark issues surrounding us.

We confess publically every week that we sin, but we never name our sins. Sin needs to be named, the sin of our government, of police, violent protestors. The sins of our ancestors need to be named, so that we understand how to be part of the solution now. Name our sins, instead of justifying our senseless acts time and time again.

Joseph's brothers had no right to treat him the way they did, but tried to justify it.

And in the end when they returned to Joseph in Egypt, and bowed before him, Joseph could have justified killing them, sending them away, letting them starve to death, treat them with an eye for an eye.

But he says – Am I in the place of God?

Are we in the place of God? To kill and hate – and justify our behaviors that condemn others, the sin that take us away from our creator. Of course not.

The gospel promise is that God is the one who justifies us and makes us right.

We don't have to justify ourselves. We are free to name our sins, because our God loves us and makes it right in the end.

It took me a while to learn that promise. I had those friends in college that taught how I could justify hating certain people.

But God was at work to change and transform me – in that Lutheran campus ministry community. God works through those communities to save us, by changing us.

God is at work now in a world shaped by human actions. Our actions and prayers don't change God. They change us. God changing the world, started with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And continues with us.