

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like many of you, I have heard of the rumors circulating about the Afghan refugees living at Fort McCoy. While I do not want to repeat these rumors, I do want people to be aware that if you hear a rumor, it is important not to spread it! As I mentioned in a recent sermon in reference to the Coronavirus, we can cause great harm when we take rumor as truth, rather than learning the facts.

Chief Scott Holum, on the Tomah Police Department facebook page, provided the following facts--

...refugees from Afghanistan are lawfully in our country and free to travel as they please. You may very well see them in our local communities while they are going through a processing system at Fort McCoy until they reach the final destination of their choice.

As many of you are aware, there have been several reports through social media regarding activities or sightings of refugees. In an effort to provide accurate information, I will inform you that the Tomah Police Department has not received any reports of criminal activity related to refugees from Afghanistan.

As I stated last week in my sermon, we need to look at what is in our hearts. Are we too harboring hatred for people unlike ourselves? Are we speaking untruths regarding persons, or groups of people, such as the Afghan refugees, because of their skin color or country of origin? I hope not, but if any of us are sinning in this way, it is time for a heart checkup and tuneup! It is time to make sure that our tongues are not spreading rumors and untruths thereby causing us to sin!

Next Saturday is the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Many of us remember where we were on September 11, 2001, when we heard about the great loss of life from the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, City. We also recall the attempted attacks on the Pentagon, and the U. S. Capitol (or White House). In the aftermath, people of Middle Eastern heritage were at times treated terribly by persons in the United States, because of prejudicial attitudes by some persons. This too, is an example of looking at another person, and generalizing what we have heard about a few persons, to all persons of similar color, ethnicity, etc...

Our second reading of last Sunday from James 1:17-27, includes the words, "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for

orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (verses 26-27). May we take this message to heart. Thanks be to God.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy