

April 29, 2018

Beckwith Sunday

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

SERMON

I have a confession to make to you. From time to time throughout the church year, I will on Monday look up the reading for Sunday morning and I think to myself I have no idea what I'm going to say about these. And there is in the back of my mind this thought that wouldn't it be nice if there was something else to preach on. It doesn't happen often, but it happens from time to time. The other side of that is from time to time I read the proper's for any given Sunday and I thought now these are readings that I can work with. This was one of those weeks. I mean who could not preach on that passage from 1st John. To love one another. Who could not preach on I am the vine, you are the branches. I was all set to go and then I was reminded it's Beckwith Sunday.

And what do you do on Beckwith Sunday. You talk about Beckwith. You will get that other sermon I promise you but not today. Today I do want to talk about Beckwith. It's our diocesan camp and retreat center. How many of you have actually been to Beckwith? Not very many. Some maybe what a quarter of the people here. Why haven't you been?

Beckwith is not that far away. You can drive for two hours and be at Beckwith camp and retreat center. It's in the Alabama side of our diocese. It's between Fairhope and Foley. It is a place that offers summer camp for children. You've heard some of the retreats that it's offering this year for adults. It is a place that is apart and yet away.

Quite frankly, I'm over qualified to talk about Beckwith. Many of you may not know for four years I was the executive director at Beckwith. That was before I got thrown ... left the diocese and returned to Missouri and then they let me back in. They let me come back.

It used to be that almost every diocese had a camp and retreat center. Because they understood that summer camps were an important for our children. It was an opportunity for them to get to know other Episcopalians in the diocese. It was also an opportunity for them to learn more about their faith. It was an opportunity for them to gather together with young people their own age. Get to know who they are. But it is an opportunity for themselves to get to who they are as individuals with other young people.

Unfortunately in the last 20 – 30 years many dioceses have decided they simply could not support a camp and retreat center. I can tell you from experience it's not easy to charge enough to pay for the staff that's necessary. To maintain the facility, to make sure the rooms are ready. To provide meals. All the things that retreat centers and certainly summer camps are supposed to do without getting more and more expensive without people questioning whether it's worth it. Even today, our diocese supports Beckwith institution within our diocese with over a \$100,000 every year. Just to make sure that ends meet.

Why is it important? Why have a camp for children? Why bother to have a place for retreats? After all we have lovely beaches we could go down and get some rooms at a condo or a hotel. We would have the gulf. We would have some meeting space maybe. We could always do retreats down there. And why don't we do that. It's all about drawing closer to God. It's all about trying to understand one's self better and to participate in God's creation in a way that we often do not have the opportunity in our day to day lives.

Yes, you could go to the beach with about 100,000 of your closest friends. At Beckwith, you go to a place where you can actually hear silence. Where you can actually hear the wind blowing through the trees. Where you can go down to Week's bay, go out on the dock early in the morning and see the dolphins playing. It's a place where kids can go in the summertime and they learn about other priests who are there to provide Christian education.

They're there and they see older college age students as their counselors to help provide activities. To help them to be a part, to learn to work with others, and to play with others. To know and understand that all this fun stuff is still part of being in the presence of God.