

February 25, 2018

## **Being the Church**

### PRAYER

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

### SERMON

As I mentioned in the announcements, it's my custom to make the sermon on the Sunday after convention a combination of a report of my experience of the convention and a sermon. Sometimes it's hard to bring the readings for the day into that. But this year that's not the case. I think they fit together pretty well.

Every convention has a theme. And the theme for this convention was being the church. It was a time for us to gather as a diocese. And to reflect on what we are truly about, what it is to be the church. And not just to be the church in worship. The Episcopal church does that pretty well, I think, I like our worship. But this was the focus on being the church beyond the walls, outside the doors, being the church in our everyday lives. In our jobs, with our families, with friends, with strangers. With our community and beyond globally. We are called to be the church in all that we are and all that we do.

In the bishop's opening address, one of the last things he said which struck me and I wrote down was that life is a spiritual issue. Life is a spiritual issue. I'm going to reflect on that a bit. Life is a spiritual issue. We are called to live in the spirit of God. We are called to allow the spirit of God that is in us through baptism to lead us and to guide us to live our lives the way that God would have us lead and live our lives. And many times that means taking the hard road. Making the difficult

decision. Doing things that for many of us we might find uncomfortable. But we are called to live spiritual lives in every aspect of our lives. Every aspect of our living.

And that reminded me of one thing that I've said before a time or two. It's been said, I didn't make it up. I stole it from somebody that I don't even give credit to. The statement is you do not have a soul. Now when you tell somebody that it makes them stop for a second. You do not have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body. You are a soul, you are created by God and you are created to live and to have life and live it abundantly and joyfully. And God has given us bodies, some better than others. That we then are able to celebrate and enjoy and live our lives in God's creation.

But we are souls. We have bodies and we are called to live that spiritual life. We are called to see one another as souls. We are called to see one another as souls who are created by God and have been redeemed by God and are sustained by God. And that is how we as followers of Jesus Christ are called to engage the world.

And I think that's part of what Jesus was saying to Peter when he rebuked him. Jesus is sharing with his disciples, those who are closest to him. Who are witnesses to all that he is doing. And so far, it's been pretty good. He's gotten some pushback, yes. But for the most part, they've been getting big crowds, it's kind of like Billy Graham calling the people together in a town. He's been sharing with them and inviting them to participate in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven. He's been healing, he's been feeding, he's been teaching. And for the most part, everything has been going pretty well.

And now is the time to set his face towards Jerusalem. And so he wants his disciples, those who are closest to him, those who are witnesses to be prepared. To know, to have a forewarning of what's taking place.

The elders and the chief priest and the scribes, they're not going to accept Jesus. As a matter of fact, they will arrest me, they will take me before the court, I'll be condemned to death. And then three days later, after the crucifixion, I will rise from the dead.

And Peter is listening to this along with the other disciples and all he hears is I'm going to be rejected, I'm going to be punished, I'm going to be killed. He only hears the bad news. The hard news. He doesn't get to the good news. He's not listening. At that point, he's already checked out. He can't believe that Jesus is saying these things to him. That these things are going to happen to his friend. That these things are going to happen to the one who he sees as the Messiah, who he has proclaimed as the son of God. No, no this can't happen to you. It's not right. It shouldn't be. Because he got stuck in the bad news and didn't make it to the good news. The spiritual news. The news of resurrection. The news of new life.

And it says in the gospel of Jesus, he looks at the other disciples, Peter standing in front of him rebuking him. It can't be that way. He looks over at the other disciples. I have the sense that the other disciples are agreeing with Peter. Yeah, oh no. We can't let this happen, we can't lose our friend. They've only heard the bad news. They haven't made that jump. What did he say? What, rise again? New life? What? They didn't make it there.

So, when Jesus sees that all of his disciples are in agreement that this can't happen. He rebukes Peter, get behind me Satan. Your mind is not set on divine things. You didn't make the leap to the good news. Your mind is set on human things. In human terms, that passion, that punishment, that suffering, that death, that's all bad stuff. Nobody wants to go through that. It's not good news.

If his mind had been set on the divine thing, the spiritual thing. Life is a spiritual issue. It is about the soul. It is about who we are at our essence. As we were created to be and given a body. If he had had his mind on divine things, then he could have accepted that what his friend was telling him is that I am going to suffer for you. I'm going to die for you so that not only will I rise but you too will have this new life. You will have this new way of engaging the world. On that deeply spiritual level on which you were created. Then all things will be changed. But you have to get to the good news. You have to engage the world on that spiritual level.

So many times, the church is like Peter. And its individual members are like Peter. We get stuck in the bad news. The bad news is that there are things going on in the world that hurt people. The bad news is that there are people who are suffering, who are hungry, who are alone, who are broken. We have people who have not heard that they are souls that have bodies. And that they are living a life in the presence of God their creator. They haven't heard that that creator loves them, cares for them whoever they are, however they are. However, they present themselves to God. They are God's child because God created them.

God loves them and because they have experienced not love from the people around them. Sometimes they can't understand that they are loved by God because they can't even love themselves. Because the people around them have given them the message that they are unlovable, unacceptable.

It's what one of the preachers, we had a video given of a sermon given at the National Cathedral. And Murray Brown was the preacher. And she talked about dehumanizing people. And that is part of the difficulty and the problems that we have in our society and also in the world.

That we dehumanize people. We make them less than humans in our lives because of the labels that we put on them. Because of their political affiliation, because of their religion, because of the color of their skin. We dehumanize them. They are not like us and therefore they aren't as good as us. And as I was thinking about what she said, another word for that I think would be appropriate is not just dehumanizing but we are demonizing people. We make it so that we can hurt them because they are not us. Isn't that what we see going on in so much of the world? How easy it is to hurt others because they are not seen and accepted as us. Of course, we are the humans, we are God's children.

That I think is seeing with human eyes and not divine eyes. And so, we were called in this convention to engage the world in that spiritual way. Engage it with mission, engage it with an understanding that our role in the world is not to dehumanize people but to spiritualize people. My words, not conventions.

We are called to remind people that you are a soul. A soul that is beloved by God, created by God, just the way that God wanted you to be. And you're living your life the way that you want to live it in the way you feel called to live it, need to live it. And the church's role is to say that's okay. You are okay. You can be part of us. We want you to know that God loves you. I know that because I know that God loves me. And if God can love me then God can love you. And your acceptable, and you are accepted in this body that we call the church. In this community that we call the church.

And we are called as individuals and as congregations as the body of Christ to engage our world with mission, with ministry. To seek out those who are lost and broken, those who are in need. And from the abundance that we have, the abundance of God's love, with the

abundance of God's spirit in the congregation to reach out and to give what we have. Whatever those resources might be. Whatever the needs are, to recognize those around us. Indifferent to the color of skin, indifferent to the political leanings of conservative or liberal, indifferent to all those things that separate us and to see those things that bring us together. That we share in common. So that we can proclaim to every child of God, you are God's beloved child. And as a beloved child of God, you are my brother or my sister, you are acceptable. You are part of us. We want you to be a part of us. And it becomes a matter of invitation to come and be a part.

You won't always have absolute acceptance. We're still people, we're still broken. We still see with the eyes of humanity as opposed to the eyes of divinity, but we will try. We will try to get beyond those things. So that you will be a part, so that you will be accepted. So that you will understand the justice and mercy that I understand. Come and be a part. Come to this body of Christ that says, "You are okay." You are called to engage. To be mission oriented. To invite.

Our bishop has what I think is a very good sense of humor. I think that because it's very much like my sense of humor. So be forewarned. But one of the statements he made is that he saw a statistic that Episcopalians invite someone to church once every 37 years. (Laughter) I'm thinking he took a little license with that. I would like to hope it's a little more often than that.

But the way to engage the world is to be invited. To invite those who are lost, to invite those who are different. To invite those who are searching, who are broken, who are hungry, who are thirsty. That is what we are called to do as the church. We are called to look at the world through divine eyes. To put away that vision of humanity, that dehumanizes, that demonizes the other because they are different. To

know and accept that God sees that person who is different as a beloved child of God just as he sees you and me as a beloved child of God. We may not do it perfectly, but we are called to do it nonetheless.

Gregory Hein – Rector