

March 11, 2018

ERD Sunday – Nets for Life

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

We have reached the midway point through Lent. This is the fourth Sunday in Lent. We have a couple more to go before reaching Palm Sunday. It is a good place to be. This Lent has been a little different as far as me and the preaching goes. Normally I preach on the proper's. I think it's important for us to hear the word of God and to try to make relevant the readings from the scriptures to our lives today.

This being the fourth Sunday in Lent, only once have I done that so far. And that was the first Sunday in Lent. Two weeks ago, I preached about what happened at our Diocesan Convention. I thought it was significant and important to do that. I do it every year. Because I was preaching on the convention that week, Episcopal Relief and Development was supposed to be way back then. It got moved a week. Then, I had already arranged for Holly to be here last Sunday to preach about Food for the Poor, that very important ministry. Which you supported very generously, I don't have a final dollar amount, but I will get that to you soon. But she was very well received as she talked about that very important ministry in the world.

Episcopal Relief and Development got pushed off of that week to this week. So, three weeks in a row I am preaching on something other than the scriptures. I think anytime you preach, you preach from the scriptures.

But this is about Episcopal Relief and Development. Even though I haven't been preaching on the proper's for each Sunday I've tried to incorporate them. But there's also been a very strong theme through these Sundays.

When I preached about the convention I preached about the theme being the church. The whole convention was centered around that. It was about who we are and what we are called to do. And what we are called to be in the world. To recognize that being church is simply not just gathering together in worship. Although that's important. And it's not just for the people who become a part of a congregation. But being the church is being the voice, crying out to come to this very special place. This very special community that's called the church.

It's also about living out the promises that we have made in our baptisms. It's about taking seriously the gospel teachings that Jesus shared so many years ago. About feeding those who are hungry. Giving water to the thirsty. Clothing the naked. Visiting those who are sick and in prison. That's being the church, that's how Jesus tells the people of his own day what it's like to be a part of this new community that reflects the fullness of God's kingdom.

It's about being in relationship. It's about being brothers and sisters. It's about caring and meeting needs when we have the ability to do so. To follow up last Sunday of Food for Poor, the story that Holly told about the people living on the garbage dump. And about how through the gifts and offerings out of abundance that the church, and not just the Episcopal church, the church has given to that important ministry. Homes are being created. People who are scrounging to find even one poor meal a day are now receiving meals so that they can be productive. So that life can be better for themselves and for their communities. That's being the church.

Today, we talk about another important ministry, Episcopal Relief and Development. It was created many years ago as the presiding bishop's fund for world relief. It was this arm of the church, the Episcopal Church USA, it was our fund to be able to reach out to people who were in desperate need. Mostly it was concerned about or seemed to be concerned about people who were facing natural disasters. Whether it be floods or famine, whether it be hurricanes. It was a fund that would be used in emergencies. To help people recover, to help bring back some kind of normal life to those who had undergone crisis and trauma.

It has since developed from there because of the generosity of the Episcopal church and its members. The fund has been made so great that it is able not only to respond to the disasters, the crises, the traumas that happen throughout the world. It has become a body that helps to reach into communities, to areas and to begin to help them to develop so that the need for crisis intervention is diminished. So that more people can know and appreciate a life where they don't have to always be on the fringe nor on the edge of existence.

It helps to develop communities. It helps to develop individuals. Yes, it still meets the crisis needs. Episcopal Relief and Development was very active in Houston after the Hurricane Harvey came through and all the flooding took place. It's a particularly good ministry for Episcopalians to support because most of the care is given through the Episcopal church in the communities that are affected. That is a good thing.

We are seen as a church that cares, that responds in times of need. We also are a people who want to help remove some of the need. We are a people who want to be the church in the world. To not only call people to a life of faith but to help people know a level of living that they have not known before. A level that we take for granted so much of the time.

In the past three years because of Episcopal Relief and Development Sunday and because Michelle Crawford has become our coordinator, our liaison with Episcopal Relief and Development, we've had some lofty goals. To help reach out, to help with the development part of Episcopal Relief and Development.

You probably remember that two years ago we set a goal of raising \$5,000 to provide a well for a community that did not have one. Where the people that had to walk great distances to bring drinkable water into their village. Sometimes the water was not drinkable. We raised that goal, we exceeded that goal. And somewhere in the world ... We don't need to see their faces. We don't need to know their names. We know that a community has a well and has clean drinking water. It's because of the generosity and the recognition of the blessings of this congregation. The willingness out of gratitude and out of abundance to share that with people we don't know.

Last year, we set a goal to raise money to buy goats, interestingly enough. Don't shake your head at me. The only reason Eric is shaking his head is because we had a fundraiser and you gave money towards different old goats in our congregation. I was one too. (Eric: Yeah, but you didn't win.) (Laughter) Not even close. But you're a lovable old goat. (Inaudible from Eric) That you'll have to take up with Michelle, okay. But it was again, when we set goals like this, when we hear stories like we heard last week about Food for the Poor, we are reminded of how truly blessed we are. We are reminded that we were blessed to be born into a society where ... Yes, there is poverty. But not nearly the kind of poverty that we see in so many third world countries.

We are reminded that it's only by God's great blessing. It's only by having sense that we are born into the families into which we were born. Into the country into which we were born. Imagine if you will be

being born in the Sudan. Imagine being a Christian in a mostly-Muslim country. Imagine what it is to have to walk miles to get water. Imagine hoping, hoping to have one meal per day to sustain you. Most of us don't know that need. When we take on goals like this for Episcopal Relief and Development, for Food for the Poor we are reminded and hopefully our hearts are filled with gratitude. Are also filled with love or concern for those who have not been so blessed and who need help. Not because they're lazy or not because they have not gone out and looking for a job hard enough but because of who they are and where they are in the world. That's why we reach out. That's why we try to help. That's what it means to be the church in the world.

This year Michelle has set a goal for us. Thank you for setting the goal. We have adopted the program Nets for Life. It is a program where \$12 will provide an insecticide treated net that can be used in what passes for a home. It might be made from scraps that they've found. It might be made from branches and such. It might be a tarp. But it's home for individuals. Individuals who live in a climate where the mosquitoes are bad, and malaria is very real. And takes the lives of thousands and thousands of people.

For \$12, one net can be bought that will help protect three people. This year instead of water or the goats for the milk and the things that they supply. We are talking about saving lives from a very preventable disease by living or sleeping within these nets at night.

Now we at least twice a year try to have a blood drive at the church. That came kind of from me because I have given blood since I was 18 years old and was struck the first time that I gave blood. That when the little pouch was set next to me. It was warm. It had my life in it. It was going to be used at some point to save a life or two. It was going to be used for someone who had gone through a trauma. It was going to be

used for someone who because of illness would require surgery and need that blood. It meant for me saving a life. That was amazing to me. I want you to think about these nets in that same way. It's about saving a life or two, or three. Actually, we're going to try to save 1,000. The goal that we've set is for a thousand people to be saved. That translates into 334 nets. It sounds like a lot. 334 \$12. We already have a beginning because we have some leftover from the goats. Because our old goat brought in so much. You should feel good about that. (Laughter) So we only have \$3,875 to raise. We're going to have some...Michelle is already lining up some fundraisers. I don't think it has anything to do with goats. No, no goats.

We will how we are advancing on our goals. If you go into the Parish Hall, you will see a net hanging. For each net there is a little cut-out of 3 people. There is already some there representing the \$133 that we already have. We will be able to see the lives that are being affected as we give towards this goal. In all the ways that we can be the church, probably giving out of the abundances of resources out of money. It may be the easiest. It's also a very important way in means for us to look beyond ourselves. To look beyond our community, to look beyond our country. To really see the need in the world and to respond to it. To know that we are making a difference. That is what it is to be the church. That's being the church.

May we always remember to be grateful. Thankful for the blessings that we have received, not because we've earned them but because God loves us. Yet remember also the great need that lies outside our doors. Outside of our country. May we give of ourselves that others may live, and others may know the great love of God.

Rector – Greg Hein

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