

March 5, 2017

Knowing Our Story and Sharing It

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

This last Wednesday we began the season of lent. Forty days not including Sundays that lead up to the celebration of Easter. Lent for all Christians should be an important time. The length of time is based on the very gospel that I just read you. That after Jesus was baptized and the spirit of God descended upon him and the voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my son, my beloved, with him I am well pleased."

He gets sent out by the spirit of God out into the wilderness. Out into the desert. Sometimes that's how we think of the season of lent. It's a time of being in the wilderness or being in the desert. But being out in the wilderness or the desert for Jesus and at the time of Jesus was a time of being face to face with one's own demons. Was a time when one was set apart and set in the presence of God. But also in the presence of self in a way that one had to look at oneself. One was not distracted by the voices of the world. One was not distracted by all the things that were going on around him but to focus on who he was. And where he was going.

I believe that's exactly what Jesus was doing when the Holy Spirit led him out into the wilderness. It was a time for him to begin his earthly ministry. It was God's time for the Christ to come on the scene and he had to be clear about the message that he was to present to the world. He had to understand who he was as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. He had to know and understand what it was to be the son of God. And that's where the temptations of Satan, the temptations of the devil come into play. As he asked Jesus, "Well if you're the son of God, IF you're the son of God. You've been out here for forty days, forty nights. You're hungry. Just use your power, you're the son of God. Use your power. Turn the stones into bread." And Jesus responds with scripture. What God has said about not living by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus is put on the pinnacle of the temple.

You want to make a story. You want to get people's attention. Fulfill the scripture. Now Satan uses the scripture. "Pass yourself down from this pinnacle in view of all these people. They're going to be astounded, they're going to be amazed. And you're going to be saying because it says right in the scriptures that for the Christ, God will give his angels charge over the Christ so that he's not harmed. So, he doesn't even hurt his foot against the stone." Again, Jesus responds from the scripture do not put the Lord your God to the test.

It's all about knowing the story. It's all about knowing who you are and who you are called to be. If you are the son of God, take a look at all the kingdoms. That's what God wants,

isn't it? He wants you to put those right in his hand. He wants all the people in all these great cities to come to know and love him. I will put that right into your hand. Again, Jesus responds, he's able to fight off the temptations. To know and understand his call as son of God, his call as Christ is to tell the people his story. To let them know and understand. To bring them to God not through some great act. And certainly, not through an act of disobedience to God. Serve God only, he tells Satan. He has to go and tell the story. He has to go and tell his story. He has to go and be who God has called him to be. Who he was from the very beginning. Now is God's time. Now is the time when he is called to go out and tell the story. To invite the people to come and be a part. Jesus' temptations were all about who he was and how he would be the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

In this season of lent, we are called to a time of self-examination. We are called to look at ourselves and see who we are. Not as the Savior and Redeemer of the world but as the saved of the world. As those who have heard this story from Jesus. Who have heard the invitation from Jesus and said yes. Who have said I believe. Who have said I will with God's help. I will proclaim by word and example the good news of God and Jesus Christ. We've said that in this church, many times. But all of us just like Jesus face our own temptations. We all have those voices that are around us that call us to this or to that. They say it's too hard to follow what Jesus has put in front of us. It's too difficult. We've talked about that the last few Sundays because of the gospel readings.

You're called to be salt and light. How can I? How can you be salt or light in the world? How do you make a difference? How do you flavor the world so that it tastes of God? How do you shine light in the darkness so that people can see and come to that place of salvation of hope, of promise? We are called by Jesus to be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. We all have our different voices and temptations that say you're not perfect. You're not ever going to be perfect. Why bother trying to be perfect, you're not going to be like God. As if that should make us stop trying to be what God has called us to be.

We are called to move forward. We are called by the son of God, the Savior of the world, the Redeemer of the world to do all that we can to follow. To hear his message, to live out that invitation to be citizens of God's kingdom. To pray for our enemies, instead of hating our enemies. But all around us there are so many voices, trying to tell us how to live out being a Christian. How to live out being a citizen of the kingdom of God. It can very different from what we have learned that we have accepted for ourselves as living out. Being a citizen of the kingdom of God. We all have heard these voices that say, you must do this and you must do it this way. But it's not what we hear here.

We also hear other voices in the world that says you must believe in God our way. This is the only way, and yours doesn't count. You don't believe the way we believe then you are fair game to be destroyed because you are against God as we see God and believe in God. More than any time in my lifetime there are voices out there that say, what God? How can you be so foolish as to believe in an almighty, all good God? Don't you see what's going on in the world? There is no good all powerful God out there. Or God wouldn't have allowed

this to happen. So, stop fooling yourselves. A lot of people listen to those voices. That's why there are so many empty churches on Sunday. What is the voice calling you to? That is the focus during this season of lent, or should be our focus. What is the son of God calling us to? How do we live out being the saved? Being the redeemed, being God's community the church in the world?

I believe that part of the answer to that and part of what we can, probably should focus on during this season of lent is how we came to believe what we believe. We have to be familiar with our story. You didn't end up here by accident. You didn't end up in the Episcopal church because there weren't any other choices. Your story led you here. Right now, in the Episcopal church USA we have a presiding bishop and we have a diocesan bishop in our diocese that have freed many of us to finally say I love Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus is the son of God. I believe that he came to offer us an invitation to be part of God's kingdom. I believe that he came and embraced us and suffered for us and died for us. So, that we could be better. So, that we could become what God created us to be. And all we have to do is follow as best we can. All we have to do is listen to the story and make it a part of us and live it out.

The other part of what our presiding bishop and diocesan bishop is saying is that I'm proud to be an Episcopalian. That's not always been the case in my lifetime where people have been free to say that. And many people are still a little nervous about saying that in the world around us. I am proud to be an Episcopalian. Now I'm proud to be an Episcopalian because it calls us to question, it calls us to investigate, it calls us to be in relationship with God and to share that with one another. To share that with the world. You see, part of what we are called to is not only knowing our story, how we came to be where we are. But, and hold on to your seats boys and girls, to share your story.

Now I've been an Episcopalian for a long time and Episcopalians are really happy about saying I proclaim the gospel by my actions. And that's great, we should live out our faith every day. In every relationship, in every opportunity, in every encounter with others to show the love of God, to show the love of Christ. To ask for forgiveness, we ought to do all that stuff. But what Episcopalians are reluctant to do is to share their story. To share who they are and why they are. And without that we lose context. We can do all the niceties that we want to in the world. We can feed the hungry, we can give clothes to those who are naked. We can visit the poor, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner. But if there's no context then people don't know that our lives are changed because of our faith, because of our belief in God. And our belief and our faith in Jesus Christ the son of God. And the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. We have to share the story. We have to share our story. And then our acts take on meaning. Then others see and know that this is just not by accident or compulsion it's because it's what we believe as redeemed children of God. And to invite others to be a part of that.

Now as an Episcopal priest, I had to learn pretty early. I became a priest pretty young in the great scheme of things. I went to seminary when I was 24. Actually, I was 23 when I started.

And so, I was 26 when I actually graduated. So, I've been a priest for a long time. And you have to tell your story.

The first thing you do when you believe that you are called to be a priest is to go see your bishop in the Episcopal church. And the first thing the bishop asks you is well tell me your story. Your story of faith. How you got to be to this place. How you believe God has called you to be a priest in the church. So, you have to have a clear idea of what brought you to that place. And after hearing that, the bishop if he is convinced that you may actually have a call to the priesthood. He will say well go to the commission on ministry which is a committee. A commission of priests, deacons, and laypersons. So, that they can also decide if you are called to priesthood. And the first question that they ask you is what's your story. How did you get to be here where you are today? Why do you think that you are called to this special ministry? If you convince them that you are actually called to this ministry, then you get the opportunity to go to the different seminaries of your choice that you are applying to. Just like going to college. And the first question that they ask you when you arrive, especially the Dean. And for me, Holmes was about six foot six and weight of plenty. And when he sitting in a chair in front of you and asks you Mr. Hein what is your story and why are you here? You better have a good answer because it just scares you right down to your toenails.

Once you get all that done. Once you get through three years of seminary. Once you take the general ordination exams and actually pass, then you get to go back to your bishop and diocese and commission of ministry and tell him one more time what your story is and how your story has moved forward in the last three years. I'm pretty well versed in telling my story. And if you haven't gotten my story, if you've been attending St. Jude's for any length of time. Then we need to talk about your listening skills in the sermons. (Laughter)

It's about telling a story. If you want to convince somebody to do something that you believe in. You have to tell them your story. If you want to invite somebody to come and be a part of something that you receive from you need to tell them the story behind it. We just started the season of lent. Four days in because Sundays don't count. I invite you, I encourage you to take some time and think about your story. Think about how your life has led you to this place and to this time. To where you are, your story of faith because it's unique. But it's meaningful and it's powerful. Remember your story and a long with the invitation a challenge. I challenge you to share that with someone else. And I'm not talking about a family member. I'm talking about somebody that you would like to invite to be a part of something greater. To be a part of the church. Now I'm partial to the Episcopal church but any church. But tell them why you are the way you are. Why you believe the way you believe.

Be that voice that calls people to believe in a grace-filled and grace-full God. One who loves and cares, one who holds nothing back. One who has given his son so that we might have hope and promise and redemption and salvation. Because when you share your story it might touch the heart of that other person and that's what we are about. Will you by word

and example proclaim the good news of Christ? The response in our prayer book, I will with God's help.