

November 5, 2017

A Different Community

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

Normally on this Sunday of the church year, I choose to do the readings for All Saint's Day. It's one of the, it's the only major feast of the church year where you're actually giving permission to move it from its designated day to the following Sunday. And that's what I usually have done. This year Wednesday fell on the first of November. And so, we celebrated All Saint's Day with a service then. So, I decided to use the readings for this proper for this Sunday after Pentecost.

When I first looked at the Gospel reading for today. I thought that possibly I had made a mistake. The Gospel reading for All Saint's Day is the beatitudes. Believe it or not, I have preached on those a few times during my lifetime. This Gospel reading is very important, but it's not very flattering to the religious hierarchy. And having been a priest for some 35 years, it stings a little bit. When Jesus points out the deficiencies in the religious hierarchies of his time. Now granted that was the first century. And it wasn't the church it was the chosen people of God, it was the Jewish hierarchy. But it's a lesson that's very important for all of us as disciples of Jesus Christ to hear and to remember.

In my years as a priest, I have led many, many studies. Whether it be of Bible, whether it be of other inspirational books. I have led my share. But I've never been called Rabbi, which is a good thing. I've been called

Father and got called to task for that one time. But the important thing to remember is that Jesus is trying to teach about what's coming. The kingdom of God. He's trying to set up the differences between the chosen people of God who are living according to law and the kingdom of God that is going to be based solely on relationships. Solely on what God is giving to God's people, giving to God's children, and what we receive and then offer back to God. And so, the changes are being established as Jesus teaches his disciples.

And he points out that the even though the Rabbi's of that time, the teachers of that time are teaching the law of Moses and he's not saying that's bad. He says, they sit on Moses seat and they teach you of what Moses taught. Listen to them. But don't practice what they're practicing. Follow the law, nothing wrong with that. But you are being called to something more and something greater.

You are called not just to hear the law and then expect everybody else to live accordingly. But you are called unlike these leaders to help one another, to support one another, to be in relationship with one another in such a way that we bear the burden together. That we live the life of the church together. The leaders that you have now, they're happy to tell you what you should do and how you should do it, but they don't help you. They leave you out there on your own.

You are going to be a different community. You are going to be a different kind of follower of God. And that's important for us to remember. Don't expect to be called a teacher. Don't expect to having places of honor. That's not important thing. The Rabbi's they have their phylacteries broad, they have their fringes long, those were signs of position. Those were signs of authority. But if they're not helping people not only to learn the law but to follow it, to come into the relationship with God that God desires. Then they are failing what they

are supposed to be doing. And he tells his disciples, his followers, you are not going to be like that. You aren't going to be teachers, you are going to be students. All your life, you're going to be students.

I have been through my share of schooling. Both before seminar, during seminary, and some after seminary; continuing education. For 35 years, I've studied the word in preparation to preach sermons, to lead Bible studies. And what I found out is that I still have so much to learn. I'm still trying to understand all that God wants me to be. What God wants us to be, what God wants creation to be. I still struggle with the questions about God.

Last week when the Bishop was here, and he was back in the Parish Hall in the forum between the services, he addressed questions that our confirmands wrote down in their letters to him. And if you were listening you heard that he as the bishop still didn't have all the answers. He's still on that journey. To know God, to love God, to be in relationship with God. As am I. As are we all. We don't have all the knowledge of who God is. We have not engaged fully in that loving relationship with God and it is part of our path and part of our journey. Day by day to grow closer and closer to God, to understand what God is calling me to and what God is calling me to be. And as a person who is ordained in the church to help others to seek out the answers to those questions.

To help others to see because we're all on that same path. We're just in different places at different times. And the questions that come into our hearts and our minds as we make that journey. As we discover more and more God's love for us and what God desires from us. And how God wants us to be in relationship with one another. We learn that as we go. And sometimes the lessons are hard. And sometimes the lessons are most gratifying. But we are called unlike those leaders of

the first century to help one another. To support and encourage one another.

When I got back from my sabbatical the first thing I started was the confirmation class for those young people and adults who were confirmed last week. So, I, they probably saw me as a teacher. But it was trying to help lay down a foundation of faith. Trying to get across what God wants for us. And what God wants from us. As we study the creeds. As we study the Baptismal Covenant and the promises that were being made. And that we all made again in the presence of the Bishop and in the presence of God as we renewed our own Baptismal Covenants, our Baptismal promises.

And I stood before the kids because they asked me some of those hard questions too. I really didn't tell them, ask the Bishop. That wasn't part of it. But because I've been ordained for this long doesn't mean that I have all the answers. I'm still searching, as you are, as the Bishop is, as we all are. But that's the beauty of this journey, is that we can ask these questions and we can rely on one another to help answer those questions. Because God gives to each of us in God's own time and in God's own way the answers that we need.

And so, we learn and share and encourage one another as we deal with the different parts of our lives. The things that come into our lives and God touches and God speaks to. We also have one here, Ansley Walker, who is seated behind me. She didn't know I was going to say this at the 8:00 service. She was a little more prepared this time. Who is on a journey of discernment. She is trying to listen to God to see if what the yearnings of her heart that say you are called to be not only a follower of Jesus Christ but one who is ordained to offer the worship, the counseling, the sacraments of the church to others.

And she is listening to that call very carefully. And she is going through the different steps of discernment and her being here amongst us is one of those steps. Where she is trying to be sure that what she feels and what she thinks God is calling her to is the same thing that the church sees and understands that God is calling her to. So that she can take that next step to continue to be a student. To go to seminary, to learn more and more so that she can come out not as one who has all the answers but one who is willing to walk with others to seek the answers. That's what we do. It's who we are. Because nobody knows the heart and mind of God. And we never will until we come to that place that God has prepared for us.

We're also on our Wednesday evening program, going through a book called The Path. Which it goes through the whole of the Bible. It doesn't go through every book, chapter, and verse. But it goes through if you will, the high points of the Bible. So, people will have an understanding from Genesis to Revelation of the flow of the scripture.

Not this last Wednesday but the Wednesday before we did the book of Joshua and Deborah was under the weather. I'm trying to figure out if she just wanted me to have to teach Joshua or not. But anytime you go through the Old Testament books and Joshua in particular where you hear God say to the people of God. You're going to go into this land, and you're going to go to these cities that are inhabited. And I want you to kill everybody. And I want you to kill every animal, and I want you to just wipe them out. And let's face it that's hard for people to hear who love God and love Jesus.

And always when we go over these readings, people will look to the person with the collar on and look for an answer. Why does God do that? Why did God tell his people to kill every living being in that city? And that's the time when you want the Bishop sitting next to you, so

you can look to him and let him answer. But there aren't any answers. There's no full answers to that, not for me. I have yet to discover the answer, let me say that. I have some ideas. I have some understandings about the scriptures not being dictated but being inspired. I have some understanding and idea that humanity leaks into those narratives and this may be as much as the people going in and understanding what revenge is like on that kind of scale if there are any remaining. I can answer that. But it doesn't fully answer God's answer. And I don't ever answer in a way that says well this is what God was doing and it was good and okay. This is how I understand it. This is what I hope is going on. All I can say is, when you get there; ask God. That's the only way we're going to get the full answer to that.

We're students. We're learning. Our lives are a pilgrimage. A journey to come to know God and God's love for us. God's love for all of creation. And we practice that, and we fail at that. And sometimes we succeed at that. But it's always moving forward. Always trying to understand. Always asking questions of God and letting God answer with the feelings and yearnings of our hearts. With the ideas that come into our minds. With the words that come from others desperately trying to answer the same questions that are bothering you and the doubts that come to your hearts and minds.

We are called to be together. We are called to be a community. We are called to search for God's answers together. To encourage one another with the burdens that seem to come with following God. And following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And helping to bear the burden so that we can at last come to that place that is prepared for us by the Savior. The good news is we're not alone. The good news is no one has all the answers. The good news is in spite of the doubts and the questioning. God loves us fully and completely. And I do believe that when we come at last to the heavenly kingdom that the answers will be made clear.