

October 16, 2016

## PRAYER

Let the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

## SERMON

I wonder if someone asked you if you were fulfilling your ministry fully what would you answer? If someone were to ask you what is your ministry, what would you answer? In the letter of Paul to Timothy, part of it was read this morning, it's a letter of encouragement to Timothy as he goes to proclaim the word of God. It's to remind him that he has the training that is necessary, he has the word of God that he has been instructed by and has made his own. He is to work diligently, he is to do the work of an evangelist, and he is to fulfill his ministry. And I think that's a message that we all need to hear because we all have a ministry. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty convinced that we have two ministries. One is the specific ministry that you are called to. You may call it your vocation but if you bring to bear your Christianity in the decisions that you make in the job that you are in. You are doing ministry. And it could be as a doctor, it could be as a lawyer, it could be as a waiter in a restaurant, it could be a lifeguard on the beach, it could be someone who works in retail, no matter what you do if you bring your Christianity, your following of Christ to the living of your life then your vocation is part of your ministry. And it's unique to you. And how you bring it to bear is up to you. But the fact that you are following Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior in your living life day by day, moment by moment, the vocation that you have is part of your ministry.

The other part of your ministry, I believe, is one that is not unique to you. It is the ministry that we all share by the promises that we make when we are baptized. Now if you were baptized before the new prayer book, which came around in 1979 (hard to call it new anymore), your baptismal vows were a little different. But if you have been present for baptism, if you have been present for confirmation, you have renewed your vows and the baptismal covenant using the words that are in our prayer book both as baptismal promises and confirmation promises, a renewal of baptism. In a couple of weeks, you will have the opportunity to do that again. I've been teaching a confirmation class for those who would like to be confirmed, who would like to take on their baptismal vows as adults or those who were baptized in another tradition to come together and understand how we as Episcopalians see the scriptures, how we see the sacraments, how we live out being Christians in our little corner of Christianity. That part of the church that we call the Episcopal church. But we make these promises and renew these vows and that is the second part of our ministry.

The part of our ministry that we are called to fulfill fully, I dare say, if I ask you to recite those more than one of us would have problems doing that but you have this wonderful book in your pews called the Book of common prayer, and if you were to open that book to page 416 and 417 you would see what's called the baptismal covenant. Now the first part of that baptismal covenant is basically the Nicene Creed. It is the statement of faith that we make every Sunday that we'll be making right after this sermon. I would ask you to please pay attention to what you say you believe because it's important to living out our faith and our ministry in the world but if you look at the top of page 417 you see a series of questions and answers that are not part of the Nicene Creed that are part of promises that we make to

God as God promises to be a part of our lives. That's the covenant, that's the agreement that we make in baptism and that we renew or reaffirm when we are confirmed or do a reaffirmation of our faith.

The first question that the Bishop will ask in two weeks, will you continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. What does that have to do with ministry? It has to do just as Paul was telling Timothy that he had the understanding of the scriptures, an understanding of the witnesses who had been a part of Jesus earthly ministry. We too have that handed down to us. The apostle's teachings are the witness that those men gave as the church was being formed. As the Holy Spirit became a part of that Jesus movement that spread beyond Jesus and the twelve and those in Jerusalem and Israel to be a part, to be going out to the whole world. So there are the apostles teaching and fellowship, this gathering together that we do on Sunday is part of that fellowship, as we pray together, as we praise together, as we are being reminded of who we are and whose we are in order to go out into the world and serve as witnesses even as those first apostles did. That we continue in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, and this thing that we call communion the Eucharist and we come together and are in communion with God. Fulfilling the commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me, this is my body and my blood." As you eat and drink of this you are being renewed, refilled, reminded living into the very covenant that we bring to the world.

The very next question, will you persevere in resisting evil? Whenever you fall and repent and return to the Lord. We are called to do our best, every moment of every day to do our best. Resist evil because evil is real in the world. It is around us. We are called to resist it with all that we have but to know that we are not alone in resisting that evil, that the Holy Spirit is part of our living of our lives. And it is our ministry to resist evil, in ourselves and in the world around us. And recognizing that we fail. Even with God's help, we fail. To be willing to repent, to turn away, to acknowledge our own failings, to acknowledge to the world that we will all fail. That being Christian is not being perfect, it's about doing the best we can to represent Christ to the world. With the knowledge that forgiveness is a part of what the covenant is, we receive forgiveness from God and in acknowledging that forgive others for the sins that they commit against us. That is part of the living out of our ministry as evangelists as Christians.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God and Christ? The word evangelist is not a real popular one in the Episcopal church. We like to think that we don't really know what it means, we'd like to caricature it as the person that stands on the street corner with the flopping Bible and reads scripture and tells you to repent because the end is near. Being an evangelist is exactly what this says, will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God and Christ. It's not proclaiming an end; it's proclaiming a beginning. It's proclaiming life, its proclaiming that we have received from God the forgiveness of sins. It is proclaiming that Jesus wants us to be a part of a community. A community where there is hope, where there is peace, where there is love and who make that part of the Jesus movement, going out unto the world, moving through the world, and overcoming hatred with love. Every time we turn away from the darkness, every time we turn away from the evil, every time we allow love to overcome that basic instincts to lash out, we are proclaiming what Christ brought into the world. New hope, new peace, a new way of living life with God present at every moment. We are called to share that, just as Timothy was.

Doing the work of an evangelist, go and share the story. Let it be the guiding light of your life. And by word and more importantly by example who will show the world the hope that it needs to see and receive. We seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself seek and serve Christ in

all your persons. This may be one of the most difficult things that we are called to do as Christians. To see those that are different from us, who behave different from us, those who may hate us. To see in them a child of God and to love them and to allow the love that comes from God to fill us and to overwhelm us. So that we might truly love them and serve them and share with them that there is a way of living without the hate, without the lossless, without the chaos. It leads us to a peace that passes understanding because the only way to understand it is that the spirit of God dwells within us. It's not of our own doing. But what God wants for us, and in us, and through us.

Just like the Pharisees sometimes we see that loving your neighbor as yourself and our question like the Pharisee, "define that would you please Jesus." Who really is my neighbor? Surely you don't mean those people. Because they are not like us, they don't believe like us, they don't think like us. And to hear over and over again, that's exactly who Jesus meant when he told the parable of the good Samaritan. The one he wouldn't cross the road to help but cross over the road to help you. He is your neighbor. The one who has compassion, the one who can see beyond all the surface stuff, all the differences, and see all inside that individual a child of God. Someone who was created with the hope that they would know God. That they would understand God's love and forgiveness and be transformed, transfigured so that they too can show that to the world. That person is our neighbor. And we are called to serve him no matter how difficult it may seem to serve them. We strive for justice and peace among all people. Again that little phrase all people not just the ones that we like not just the ones that are like us. All people and respect the dignity of every human being.

Sometimes we get so lost in rhetoric, sometimes we get so lost in who's right who's wrong who's good who's bad that we forget that we have promised to God that we will respect them. That we will seek justice not just justice for myself but to see have our eyes opened to the injustices in the world around us. And allow our one small voice to speak against it. To claim for the other no matter how different they may be. The same justice that we desire for ourselves. And it is a promise we make and always the answer to these questions is, "I will, with God's help." We're not alone in this. We cannot possibly attain it on our own but we know that God is with us. That is the promise that is made and is declared from the cross, it is declared from the resurrected Christ, it is our hope, it is our truth, it is the resurrection of life that we are trying to live here and now. So that we might truly live the resurrected life in God's kingdom. You have a ministry two. Whatever your vocation, whatever gifts and talents have given uniquely to you, to bring your Christianity to bear in that vocation in that working in the world, in that being in the world. The second is a ministry that we all share, to be an evangelist, to declare justice and peace for all people. To seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to respect the dignity of every human being. If Paul were writing a letter to us, these are the things that he would say to us. This is your ministry, fulfill it.