

Third Sunday after Pentecost
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Years ago when I was in Ft. Worth, I had an interesting incident happen. At first it seemed like a real blessing; but things began to change after awhile. I was younger and more naïve in those days. A woman showed up at the church one day that was quite dissatisfied with the Episcopal parish where she had been attending and had heard about our little Episcopal church and had decided to come give us a try. I was pretty thrilled, to tell you the truth, because she was coming from one of the largest, most prestigious Episcopal parishes in the city where I was serving as a priest at that time.

To have this lady come from that church where she had headed for many years their entire Christian education department, was sort of a coup for me... to be able to steal her away. She told me that she had been there for many years. She said the longer she stayed there and the more she listened to the sermons coming from the pulpit, the more she had come to feel uncomfortable with what was being taught in that parish. Apparently, she had heard that we were teaching a ‘truer’ form of the Gospel at our church. So she transferred over to us.

That was great for about a year until one day she came into my office and told me she had visited yet another Episcopal church in town and found that they were teaching what she considered an even purer form of the Gospel. She told me she was going to transfer away from our parish and go to that parish because, as she put it in her own words, I didn’t live up to her standards.

Well, I had been pretty polite in the conversation up to that point, but when she said I didn’t live up to her standards I looked at her and said “My dear, God did not put me in this world to live up to your standards. God put you and me together in this world, that working together both of us might try to help each other live up to *God’s* standards.”

Well, that assured her transfer. She was out the door.

Now the point was, this woman . . . and I speak of a woman who was an outstanding Christian . . . I have not seen her in many years, but this is a fine, fine good woman. But she kept thinking that somewhere out there she

was going to find this perfect church and, of course, what she could not admit was that what she meant by a perfect church was a church where everybody thinks just the way she does. There just isn't any such church out there. There isn't that one perfect place you're going to find.

Now let's leave her, for just a moment and skip ahead to the readings we had today. We had the reading from the book of Job. It's one of my favorites. If you remember the story of Job, he's a good man. He's tested by God with all sorts of affliction and suffering and throughout the book he is constantly going to different people and friends, trying to find the answer: "Why do I suffer when all I've tried to do is goodness and righteousness in the world"? Now the answer that God gives him and the answer is what we just read today, is not very satisfying to a lot of Christians.

However, it happens immensely satisfying to me. It makes wonderful sense to me. The reason it does is unfortunately I am one of those people who has gone through life always a little bit cocky and a little bit sure that I probably have things better figured out than the person sitting next to me. And the truth of the matter is, that a lot of times when I starting thanking God in my prayers for the many good things he's done for me, I find myself kind of throwing in these little statements like, "Oh Lord, I want to thank you for the lovely, wonderful job that you gave me down at St. Wilfrid's, which as you know is quite a drive from where I live at \$3.00 a gallon, Lord, but you in your wisdom, I'm sure, know what you are doing." In other words, I'm always throwing in these little complaints.

Finally, when God has listened to this from Job for a long time, he speaks to him out of the whirlwind and says, "Who is this? Who is this man who is coming to me with all these idle words? Job, you have so many questions about this world, this universe. Where were you when I laid the foundations of this universe? Where were you when I made the mountains rise up and cut out the valleys?" In other words, what He is saying to Job is, "If you don't like the way I run the universe, you have my permission to go and create your own universe and run it anyway you want. But until the time comes that you are capable of creating your own universe, you're just going to have to settle for mine. And you are going to have to trust me."

I have found that when I follow that advice to realize in humility, that maybe God does know a little bit more about the universe he created than I do. Maybe He does know what he's doing when he's running it even though I

can't always see it. I find that my life goes better when I go to that kind of thinking instead of thinking I know more than God.

Now the Job story sets us up today for the gospel reading. We have the image of the disciples with the apostles who are with Jesus in a boat when a storm arises on the sea. There's a lot of imagery used in the history of the Church and the Jewish people to show the people of God, or for Christians, the Church imaged as a ship on the sea. Many times it is a ship in distress or a ship as a last resort of salvation against the raging sea.

I remember as a child those pictures I used to see of Noah's ark. In the children's Bibles there were always these wonderful, sort of fun pictures where Noah's ark looked somewhat like a giant, wooden Carnival Cruise Line party ship with the elephants and the cute little bunny rabbits playing shuffleboard and volleyball while they are waiting for the rain to stop. Later, as I got older, I would see these old Victorian prints that weren't quite so pretty. They showed Noah and the animals and his family safely on board, but the doors to the ship were shut and all around it were drowning people, screaming and begging and banging against the doors of the hull, "let us in". But it was too late and you knew they were going to drown and die and I was scared.

Then we have this image of the Church as a ship on the seas. And we see how the Apostles react in that storm tossed boat. What happens? A storm arises. Jesus is asleep in the boat and the storm does not awaken him. The Apostles are terrified. Remember, this is not a time or a place where they are going to send the Coast Guard and the helicopters out to get them. If anybody's injured, there's no rescue squad to rush them to the emergency room. In fact, there's no emergency room. No. This is two thousand years ago. When a little boat was out on the Sea of Galilee 2,000 years ago and a storm came, it was a literal life and death situation. Under those circumstances, most sailors would know there was a significant chance that they wouldn't survive, that they would drown. They're scared. And what do they do? They, as a group, together and undivided, rush to Jesus and say "Lord, help us. You are the only one Who can save us." And he stands up and he says, "Peace, be still."

Notice in the bible, that when angels and messengers of God appear to people, the first thing they always say is "Do not be afraid." And the next thing they say is "Peace". God brings you and sends you peace. The

demons want you to be afraid, because when you are afraid you are panic stricken, you are divided, you become paranoid. You don't know who to trust. You don't know where to turn and therefore the demons can easily manipulate you. When you're afraid, you're easy to manipulate. That's why when angels come, they say we are not here to manipulate, we are here to deal with you as a person we respect. Therefore, be at peace. Do not be afraid. And at the command of Jesus, the seas calm as the Apostles say to themselves, "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Now, think about what the apostles *could* have done. Instead of staying united and saying we must go to Jesus who alone can help us, they could have said "Uh oh. We're in trouble. What do we do?" Well, there are twelve of them in the boat; there probably would have been twelve different ideas they would have come up with. Suppose one of them had decided, if we redistribute the weight in the boat, maybe that will balance it and we'll be safe. And so he decides if most of them stay in the middle and two of the big guys go to the stern and two of the other big guys go to bow, maybe that'll balance it. So that person says, "If we put more weight in the bow...." and before he can finish the sentence the other panic stricken Apostles as a body all rush to the bow of the ship causing it to go under the waves and sink to the bottom.

Or they could have said, "The problem is we have too many people in the boat; let's start throwing people out until the ship looks like it will stay afloat better."

They could have said to themselves, "This boat isn't going to make it, I'm jumping over the side and take my chances in the water."

None of those ideas would have worked. What worked was they stayed together and as a body they turned to Jesus and he spoke to them together, and they were saved. Some of you probably know that last weekend I went to the General Convention just to visit for a few days. The General Convention is the highest legislative authority in the Episcopal Church which meets every three years. If you watched CNN in the last couple of weeks you probably saw something about the General Convention. How many of you saw something in the newspaper, or television or radio about the Convention? How many of you saw something when you heard that or saw that that had to do with sex and division and fighting in the church? How many of you saw on the news what we voted to do about the

Methodists?

One? Two of you? Hmmmmmm. So, you heard all about the sex, but you didn't hear about the Methodists? Gosh, I could have sworn that CNN covered that about the Methodists. I guess I was wrong. Well, in the midst of the sexual bloodletting that CNN would have you believe was going on, the Episcopal Church quietly and unnoticed voted in favor of something wonderful. For a couple of hundred years we have been divided from the Methodists because of our arguments with them over ordination issues and Sacraments and things such as that so that we have not even been able to worship together. But at this last General Convention, we said, "The heck with all that division. From this day forward Methodists and Episcopalians not only allowed but encouraged to meet together and to share the Eucharist". Generations of theologians and academics sitting in committee meetings trying to figure out how to end our divisions and get us back together hasn't worked. So we decided to try something really revolutionary like having the entire family sit down at the same table for dinner together and speak to each other for the first time in two centuries. Maybe that will work.

Well, surprise, surprise, having the whole family over together for dinner often does work. It often means that there will be a lot of fighting and a lot of squabbling, but it means that we sit at the same table and work it out together. And people, I am making a real commitment. I have got to get permission of the Vestry and the backing of the staff, but before the year is out, I want to find some Methodists here in the Huntington Beach area who want to start meeting with us and us with them and let's end these silly squabbles and divisions that have kept us apart.

What does St. Paul say in the book of Romans about who is in the church? He says quite clearly, "If you believe that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of God and if you believe that he was raised from the dead on the third day, then you are in the Church and you will be saved." He doesn't say anything about whether we are to have Vestries instead of Board of Elders. He doesn't say anything about the whether the Altar has to be at the center of the Sanctuary instead of the pulpit. He doesn't say anything about the architecture of churches or whether or not you should preach a sermon wearing street clothes or wearing vestments, and if you wear vestments whether or not you have permission to iron butterflies on them. He doesn't say anything about any of that. He says, "If you believe that He is the

promised Messiah of God and that He was raised from the dead, then we are in the same church and we are going to Heaven together.”

I think it is time we get back to that kind of teaching and stop finding all these things to fight each other about. You know when we ordained women and everybody was screaming about, “Oh, the ordination of women and how this was going to destroy the Church and la-de-da-de-da and so on.” Do you know what theological teaching came out of the whole discussion of the ordination of women that will survive for thousands of years when people will look back? What was the subject that the Episcopal Church really dealt with? The theology of Baptism. The writings and the books that were produced during the arguments on the ordination of women about what it means to baptize a person into the church are extraordinary. And you would be surprised at the stuff that is coming out of the human sexuality discussion. It is not just the homosexuality. It is family, marriage, gender roles, and much more. Do you know the theology that is being produced out of this whole debate on Human sexuality, the theology that will survive? The incredible teaching that is coming out is on the Incarnation and the Trinity and what it means that God became flesh, that God entered into his creation. That is what is coming out of this, and that is the gift from God.

AT the General Convention, I heard a small but vocal band of people saying, “Let’s jump out of this ship; we don’t like this ship.” I also heard some people saying , “We do like this ship, but we don’t like the other people in it. Let’s throw all the people overboard that don’t look like us.” And I heard other people saying, “No, let’s just panic and run around in circles.” And

More significantly, I heard other people saying that we needed to set our divisions aside if we are going to truly be the hands and arms of Christ in the world. The Episcopal Church has been quietly working at the last two conventions to set up the infra-structure needed to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals. For six years, we have been quietly setting into place throughout the world the agencies and networks that will be needed in the next fifty to one hundred years to finally end poverty, to finally get medical treatment to everyone on the planet, to finally make sure that people always have clean drinking water, and to see to it that the one and a half billion people on the planet who have never used electricity get to have electricity to make their lives easier. That is what is coming out of this convention.

I personally have become very, very tired of people who use fear and threats of division and temper tantrums to try to get their way. And I mean people on both sides of every question that I can imagine. God put us here as one people, undivided. He asked us to learn how to live together in spite of our differences.

Now as for me, I am getting ready in a month to go visit my family in Texas. Boy, you talk about the people who gave meaning to "dysfunctional family." You have no idea. I actually remember one time in junior high school where we were standing around after school trying to decide what to do to entertain ourselves. One of my friends suddenly said, "I know! Let's go over to Lee's house and watch his parents." I grew up with that kind of reputation. At one point, my brother even ran away from home. Years later, he said, "I distanced myself from the family, but I always knew that it was my family." And he will be part of that little family reunion when I go to baptize two of his daughters next month. You see for me, it has never been a question of where to go to find the "right" family or where to go find the "pure" Church. No matter what label you put on the front of the building, it is still the church of Jesus Christ when you come inside or it has no business putting on any Christian label. Just like I will always be part of my family, I will always be part of Christ's one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church whether I stand before an altar in Los Angeles, Greenwich, Connecticut or Fort Worth, Texas or Huntington Beach.

People, I will end by quoting Sir Thomas Moore, who is "divided" from us by Human denominational differences that are not of God's making. Saint Thomas Moore said, "Let's just all get to Heaven together."