

Fifth Sunday of Pentecost
Rt. Rev. Jon Bruno

7-09-06

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

It is an important thing that we do today being together as a community of faith, worshiping our God, being in relationship with one another in such a way that we believe our relationship will transform this world around us. I want you to hang onto that key, that it is us being gathered together that raises up the spirit of God and gives the spirit of God voice and strength in the world around us. Now where will that come from? The fact of life is, it's every one of you people who sit in this room, whether if you're doing music, whether you're leading worship, whether you're handling the sound, whether you're sitting back there with your child on your lap, you're a part of the body of Christ. The Spirit dwells within you, is grafted into you at your baptism and has come alive in your confirmation and your full becoming as a Christian. It is the vitality of God that is with you. Over and over again God's grace is with us in such a way that we're transformed people, that our strength and our courage becomes more powerful because God dwells within us.

When I read the first lesson preparing for this sermon, I immediately thought about talking to my children. Sure the repetitive lines over and over "You'll speak my words to them whether they hear or refuse to hear you, for they are a rebellious house". We are the body of Christ in this world. We're called to express the voice of God to the world around us, so that God hears who we are and what we have to offer to the world. You know, it's important that we stretch out our hand and make it a hand of healing in this world, and draw people to the love of God by knowing that they are the acceptable humanity of God, that they are people who are chosen by God. It doesn't matter if you are a single parent, it doesn't matter if you're old and gray like some of us, or if you're young and vital. The hand of God is reached out, stretched to you, to draw you into the community of faith and make you one with the Body. Through the repetitive nature of the lessons that we read, the over and over again stating God's love and grace for us. As it says in this lesson, "Say it again, even if they refuse to hear you."

I was with my grandsons in Washington, D.C., this last week. I took a week's vacation after General Convention. Let me tell you, I needed it. When we got there we went to all these places. It's usually the first day that they're a little bit

wily. I call them our wily coyote's. I guess I watched too many cartoons when I was a kid. They go this direction, that direction, and they want to go 90 miles an hour and they don't seem to have these things (ears) turned on. But after about the 3rd or 4th day of repetition, of speaking the same calm words to them, of saying "Guys, open Biggies door, open the door for elders when they walk through, open the door for ladies when they pass by. Thomas, take your blasted hat off." It's in those repetitive statements, even the 'blasted hat' one, that before the end of the week together, all of sudden the hat was off as soon as he passed through a portal. Before you knew it, it was a game. They would see who could get to Biggies door first. Biggie is Mary, my wife. That's her nickname. And they would run to the door and open it, and then as I said to them "make sure its clear", those little imps stood at the door, every time and shouted: "Clear, clear." They would not shut the door until Mary or I said 'clear'. So the repetitive message got across over and over again.

It's the same with the preaching of the Gospel; a Gospel of love and mercy and grace. We have to hear it over and over again. There are some faces that are real familiar to me in this congregation because I ate at Cursillo a lot of years with them and the fact of life is, it took a lot of years to get that repetitive message through this concrete, but when it got there it drained directly to my heart. It came to a place of understanding, of wisdom in my heart. Not because I was so smart, but because the community of faith upheld me and brought me to a place where I would have understanding of who I was and to whom I belonged. That I didn't belong just to me, it wasn't my indulgence upon myself and my way that was most important, it wasn't my power. What it was was that I realized that the love of God, the grace of our God is what kept me going and was most important in my life.

The second lesson (2Corinthians 12:2-10). You know I don't even know if I for sure know where the third heaven is. I'm looking for one, and as far as I'm concerned I've started in the process. I've put my oars in the water and I'm moving toward the power in the presence of the Holy. That's heaven enough. But this guy apparently knows where the third heaven is. I hope somebody shows me, maybe you guys could help me out there. But the fact of life is that, the most important line is: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

The grace of God is a really important thing. If we talk about the love and the presence of the Holy in our life, we have to understand that grace is not something that comes out of a big water cooler that God pours over us. Grace is something

that dwells within us because God dwells within us, and that the grace of God is like being held, like being held in the hands of God in a time of danger. I don't know if any of you have ever had problems in your life, but I've had a few. Yah! Don't chuckle. You know. This leg, when it got cut off, that I couldn't even dance on it. I danced with one of you this morning already, didn't I? It was the grace of God that held me up. The prayers of all the people of this Diocese that exhibited and expressed the grace of God that held me up, that made me buoyant. I remember my mommy telling me over and over again when I was a little boy, I was a big little boy let me tell you, and my mommy would tell me over and over again, she always tried to make it diminutive, and she would say: "Jonny, Goddy loves ya. I didn't feel so bad being called Jonny because she made even God small. Goddy loves ya!" Then she would envelop me in her big hands; she was a woman of 5 foot, 10 inches tall, she had been an AAU swimmer and a propeller mechanic during the Second World War when my dad was off in the European theater, and she would just envelop me. She would put her arms around me and hold me in such a way that I knew I was loved. That's what the grace of God feels like. It's when you put your arm around your child in church or arm on your child's knee when they're bouncing it like this and driving you nuts in church. That's the grace of God. They know that they're not going to get slapped. They know that they're gonna get loved into compliance. The grace of God is those enveloping hands that hold us in times of disaster.

You know I got thinking about it when I was preparing for this sermon about all the times that the grace of God has been most important to me. I talked with Bob (Voorhees) a few times recently when I was on a trip with my sister, 'cause my sister has fourth stage breast cancer. She's going through treatment and the doctor's were amazed that she's being able to do everything that she did before. The cancer's in her bone now and we know its not going to stop, but the fact of life is she's healthy and strong and vital and the grace of God are those hands holding us all up. It feels good every time I talk to Bob to have him say: "How's your sister doing? How are things going?"

It's the reason that I'm here today because the grace of God is with us all and I'm here holding us all up. We're in a time of transition, but I've gotta to tell you its going to be great and wonderful. I have all the confidence in your clergy team and guess what? I'm your Rector. I am. Don't laugh so hard. Your Warden's are going to be here and your Vestry, and we've worked together, and as this transition goes through it's going to be an exciting opportunity to see the abundant grace of God be perpetrated in this place. God is a powerful God. A mighty and merciful

God who will envelop us and hold us all up even though we have times of sorrow or sadness. Grace! You are the agents of grace.

Now I want to talk about the lesson that I liked least, the Gospel. I read a lot of Scripture, let me tell you. Every day I read all my lessons, I do the Daily Office, I do my meditative prayers and then as I'm doing my meditative prayers all of sudden into my mind comes a passage of scripture and I say: "How did that get there?" Then I go read it and it speaks specifically to what I was meditating on. I get a little worried; Somebody's watching. It's important that we understand that the grace of God is constantly with us, that the power of God is dwelling within us and that we need to grow. But you have to understand why this lesson frightens me. I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I came into the Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. I was really worried about the Prophet having no honor in his homeland. But I depended upon the grace of God and I found that the grace of God has supported me and loved me and nurtured me and cared for me and made me more than I've ever asked or imagined.

A couple of weeks ago I was at General Convention, and long, long days and long hours just to get our stuff done so that we could stay in the Anglican Communion and do some things, so that we could be part of whole body of Christ worldwide. You realize that the Episcopal Church doesn't need the Anglican Communion, but we need one another. The Episcopal Church is probably financially the most solvent church in the nation, I mean in the world, and if you count the numbers in England and Australia and some other places, we're the biggest and healthiest church. You know how many countries the Episcopal Church is in? Forty-Six, its hard to believe, but the Episcopal Church is in forty-six countries. Why was General Convention so important? Because we're not a bunch of individuals, we're a Communion. We're people based in the Creedal Statement. You know that today you're going to say the Creed, We Believe in one God..., you know it. Its that Creedal Statement that gives us drive and the history and the tradition is something that is very important to us. As we come to the other side of General Convention, we did it again folks, and it's wonderful, it's the most fabulous thing.

There's a guy who writes Blogs. His name is David Virtue and he doesn't write too many nice things about me; in fact, I've never heard him write anything nice about me. He's a very, very conservative person, but he gave me credit for the election of Katherine Jeffers Shori. For about two days I walked around with my neck stretched out. I said" "Wow, this is wonderful." You have to understand who this woman is that we just elected Presiding Bishop, and she is in her own land and she will have honor here. Katherine is a PhD in Ocean Sciences. Taught

at Oregon State. Brilliant woman. When we were talking at Canuga at the House of Bishops' meeting before the election, she was answering some questions, because they all had to get up there and we grilled them. Just like an Episcopal Church. See if they make any mistakes, and she said something that has stuck with me and held my heart in joy. Katherine said: "Well, you know I think its like (being in the Anglican Communion), I think its like whales giving birth." Right there I thought she's going to talk over my head, I'm not going to understand anything, but then she talked right to me and to a bunch of other people, she said: "Whales leave their places around the circle and they come to a new and different place singing a song and they come to Hawaii and in Hawaii they sing their songs to one another. When they leave, their songs have been changed by their relationship and they carry off a new song that is part of other people's songs." That's a fantastic image and that's what we as the body of Christ are doing. The repetition, all those things, they're good, they're important, but we need to sing songs that are leadership songs that draw us to a place of understanding who we are and to whom we belong. I don't belong to just Jon Bruno, I belong to every one of you, but most important I belong to my God. It's important that we understand that the power and the presence of the Holy dwells within us and we're given charge and we're agents of it and we need to love other people with that power and the presence of the Holy.

In the Gospel lesson for today (Mark 6:1-6), when Jesus went back, all the guys in the neighborhood said: "Hey! Wait a second. This guy's really interesting, but isn't he the dirty nosed kid who played ball with us in the street? Isn't he the kid who's Simon's brother. Why should we pay attention to him?" Isn't that what it says in this? I got to tell you, pay attention to the voices of the people around, even if you've grown up with them all of your life because they can teach you.

When I came back from General Convention and from vacation with my grandsons and my wife, we I cashed in all of our miles and we moved up to first class. It was one of those flights that went from here to here, then stopped, then went from here to here. We had to go a little longer, but we got to sit in big seats. Thomas was flying home with us, Christopher was going to his other grandparents, but Thomas was flying home with us and we got separated in the plane. They were on one side up one row and I was seated over here. The guy sitting next to me, his name was Ronnie, and he's an engineer for TRW developing an electric steering system that on first try gave 5 to 7 percent increased mileage in gas per gallon. He was interesting to talk to. There was a guy behind me and another guy in front of me. The little guy in front of me was a bald headed guy who played on a program called "Sex In the City". He wore glasses and he was sitting there and he's a very

skeptical person, let me tell you. And then the guy behind me was a big guy, about my size, and his name was Ernie Hudson. If you ever saw Ghost Busters, he's the big handsome black man in Ghost Busters. Sitting next to him was a Professor from the University of Oregon. So what does this have to do with the sermon?

The fact of life is I was coming back wondering, God, I can't wait to get back to my community, I can't wait to get back to the Community of Faith, I can't wait to get back to prayer, I can't wait to get back to talking about my faith and sharing it with people around me, and lo and behold the guy sitting next to me says: "I told you what I do, now what do you do?" I was wearing a Tommy Bahama shirt and a pair of slacks, I looked almost like Bob over here, it was unbelievable. I said: "I ah ah ah ah, I've just been with my two grandsons for a week." I've done plenty of Pastoring let me tell you, and I was planning to sleep most of the way home and all of a sudden I said, "Well, I'm a Priest." "Oh, what church?" "The Episcopal Church." "Oh, he said, you just had a Convention; you elected a woman as your presiding bishop." Then he said: "What church do you serve?" I said: "A whole bunch of them." He said: "Whole bunch, what do you mean,? What's that big ring." I said, "I'm the Bishop." You should have seen it. It was almost visible; the two sets of heads behind us come straight over the chair and hang down on both sides. The little guy who was the real skeptic guy in the front, you know what's bad – those of us that do a lot of business travel – when you see their heads craning because of muscle tension in the neck, so Ronnie and I started having a conversation. Then the Professor and Ernie and I joined in and were talking about how God was transforming our lives. One guy raised in Oneonta, N.Y., in a very, very interesting community and the other guy raised as a Baptist but couldn't buy that anymore; and the other guy in front was raised as a Jew but was now a faithful Christian. The other guy, the Professor, was raised in a very wonderful Christian intellectual faith. Before we got done... half-way to Los Angeles... you know 4 hours on an airplane breeds all sorts of strange folks, we had a relationship going. We'd intertwined our lives with one another, because we were telling, (and excuse me ladies and I apologize Mother) but the fact is we were telling man stories. We talked about combat and about how the grace of God held us up, we talked about thinking how power was more important than relationship and how stupid we had all been. Only one of us of the five didn't agree with the fact that power was less important than relationship. Big Ernie behind me quoted this Gospel passage to me. He doesn't read the Common Lectionary and he quoted this Gospel passage. I had my papers that I was planning this sermon with, I said to him: "Let me show you something, this is freaky", and we started talking about this homily and I knew that the grace of God was there again. I could feel the cradle of the hand beneath

me. I could feel being held by the power and the love of God in such a way because I had risked, even though I didn't want to, to share my heart with the person next to me. I had teachers and here I am supposed to be the high mucky mucky teacher of Los Angeles for the Episcopal Church. But I had teachers all around me and even the skeptical guy in the front seat, neck stopped careening and shaking and he turned around and started talking to us. And we had carried on this dialogue, and we talked about everything from the Book of Revelation to this Gospel passage, to the strength and love of Christ and how we had experienced it in our lives; when we were being shot at, laying in a pool of our own blood, or being beaten up, or going through a divorce, or whatever, and it was amazing. The presence of the Holy was there and we were intertwined among others lives. We exchanged cards and addresses, four of us did, and one of those four knows the other guy so maybe he'll get a knock on the door. We are going to get together again to see if we can share once again. Not recreate the experience on that plane because I don't think we could ever do it, but get together sort of as old friends and share. Share who we are with one another and where we can help one another become more important as agents of God. Not more important as people, but more important as agents of God in this world, in this place, at this time.

I look forward to sharing and answering your questions at the Forum today, about General Convention or anything you want to talk about, but I want to close with a story about Katherine Jeffers Shori. I already told you one. Katherine Jeffers Shori is the first Anglican Episcopal Primate in the history of our church. That's something folks. Do you know what happened the day before yesterday? Two days ago after all these years, the English church passed the Ordination of women Bishops. An agent of change. The Bishops here in this Diocese are very supportive of Katherine Jeffers Shori. She's a very good friend of all of us and she's from this Province. Stacy Sahls is another guy who's a real sharp guy and he was on all our lists to vote for. In all honesty, we all said we'll vote for her on our first ballot but she's never going to get elected. And so we set up a plan that one of us would vote for one candidate which was me. I would vote for Stacy Sahls, and the other three would vote for Katherine, and we would see what the first ballot carried, because we were sure that we wanted somebody other than a couple of candidates to get elected. So second ballot came around. On the first ballot she had gotten 44 votes and she led, and you've got to understand there only 200 of us in that room and 95 elects you. We all shook our heads, people were looking all over the place. Then on the second ballot she went up a couple more votes and the other folks dropped some votes and a couple of them went up some votes. We said ah, look at these people from Province 4 down in the southeast, they're going to team together and one of them is going to be the next Presiding Bishop.

I turned over at the end of the second ballot and I said to Stacy who was sitting right behind me, I said “Stace I’m moving to Katherine”, and he said “what took you so long I did on the last ballot.” On the next ballot, Katherine Jeffers Shori was elected and you should have seen that room. Every individual in that room, conservative, liberal was amazed. Katherine was standing up because the Presiding Bishop told her to stand up, and after about two seconds, vroom, her tail hit that pew like you wouldn’t believe. She just shook her head. She was the most amazed of anybody. But then, it was a brilliant thing, as we waited over the next two hours for the House of Deputies to be notified of the election so they could concur, every single human being in that room went up and embraced her, shook her hand, whether they had voted for her or not. There was no rancor among the candidates, which is very unusual. I waited and stood back and watched all of this.

A few months ago, Dick Shori sat in our back yard at the Episcopal residence that is the home your Bishop lives in. Dick said: “Hey Jon do you think there’s a chance?” We’re both drinking Guinness, not too cold, and I said, “Dick if everybody votes for her, who says they’re going to vote for her, she’ll get elected on the first ballot.” I was blowing smoke. But Dick said to me after it was over, “You warned me.” I gotta tell you, maybe we should turn our country over to women and maybe there would be no more war and maybe there would be peace because they don’t have the fear of talking like the four men on that airplane had about talking to one another, and maybe they would communicate. I pray that this is a new age of peace and tranquility and leadership for our Church.

When she was done shaking everyone’s hand and thanking them, I walked up to her in a quiet moment and I dropped to my knees in front of her and I asked her to bless me. She said, “Jon, get up, get up.” I said, “Not until you bless me.” It felt like Jacob and Esau right there for that moment. I wanted to be anointed by this person who I am sure in some way will change the world. I pray each and every one of you, and I pray for myself, that we can go forth from this place today and carry hands of grace, transforming the world around us in such a way, by enveloping people speaking the message, but doing as St. Francis said: “Preach the Gospel everywhere you go and when necessary use words.” Be Faithful, be the Holy people of God that you are, and we will be the presence of Christ here in Huntington Beach.

In Jesus Holy Name. Amen