

**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Wilfrid of York Episcopal Church
The Rt. Rev. J. Jon Bruno**

9-17-06

Isaiah 50: 4-9
James 2:1-5,8-10,14-18
Mark 8:27-38

I was worried the last couple of times I was here, I didn't see Roger sitting there in his kilt, and I thought maybe he got it caught in a door somewhere or something like that. I pick on Roger because Roger's my friend. I'm not dressed up like a Bishop today in the sense that I don't have a miter and a staff because it's the image of what we have in our hearts that makes up who we are. Sometime during this service I'm going to put a miter on somebody and draw a comparison of what difference that makes. And I'm going to give somebody else my crozier and have her hold it for the rest of the service, and they'll know why I don't use them today.

Listening to the word of God is an important factor in our lives. We need to listen to the presence of the Holy as it speaks to us constantly. The problem is we get things rigidly implanted in our minds and categorized in a neat file catalog that we can pick out things and say: "Well, I should do this or I should do that." But that's not what God asks us to do, especially in this first lesson. The Lord has given us the ability to be teachers in this world. Teaching by example, by being the people of God in such a way that we express the love of God in all that we undertake; whether we hold a child, whether we laugh. It wouldn't be normal to be you right now because you're sitting here with your baby in the room strapped, I believe, on your husband's chest. Your son-in law? Oh, look how young you must be. The fact of life is, that's a teaching moment; it's a teaching moment saying men are capable of being nurturing, loving human beings in this world. Men are capable of sharing the labor of birthing children.

This last week I watched a movie on television with my kids, and it was about twenty minutes before I really figured out what was going on. It was a movie call Pleasantville, and it's a movie about people going into a 50's television set and everything turns into black and white. Can you imagine how boring it would be if everything in Huntington Beach was black and white? You would never know the ocean, you'd never know the beauty of the mountains in the distance when you can see them. You'd never know the beauty of the flowing trees. You couldn't teach your children about the difference, the differences that are wonderful in this world. You wouldn't know the difference in skin colors, because everybody would be black or white.

We, as the people of God, are taught to be teachers, and we have to open our hearts and our minds to teach everyone. But that means that we have to have our ears wider open like it says in the second line of this passage, because we have to hear and listen to the voice of God as well as to the teachers around us. How many of us enter into a relationship with our children and the only way we do is say do our way because that's the way you're going to do it. We can't do that. We have to hear who they are; we have to understand that if we teach them to be rigid we end up teaching them to be reactionary. We're the people of God, and if we're called to be teachers of the world about love, about nurturing, about care, about the acceptability of differences in this world, then we had better open ears and hear what our God said.

If you have respect for me because I wear this hat, or you have respect for me because I carry this stick, it's not respect. (Bishop Bruno places his miter on the head of a member of the congregation and continues) Yours is better than mine. It's perfect. I have hair, his head is perfect, (bald). It's yours for the rest of the service. (You can take that off in a few minutes.) I tried all my years of life in school to stay out of the dunce chair. How many of us remember dunce chairs? I went to a Roman Catholic school, and I remember the rod and the dunce chairs. Sadly enough I made it to the chair a lot. Now I have my own pointed hat, and I'm to wear it all the time as a symbol of the office. But a Bishop becomes a Bishop not because they see authority, but because of the fact they are willing to listen to the people of God. They're willing to listen to God speaking to them every day of their life, that's what this is about. A Bishop is a person who walks in a new and different way with people so they can understand the power and the grace and the wonder that dwells within their heart.

Sure, there's not a day in my life when I don't read the Scriptures, mark them and literally digest them. Sure, there's not a day that I don't read a text that people tell me about that are new and different text. Things that people have to say, like Barbara Brown Taylor or Phyllis Tickle, like Hans Kuhn. I read those. I mark them, I inwardly digest them, and then I go into prayer and listen for the voice of God to call me to where I have to be. It's not because you wear my funny hat or that you carry my stick, it's because I listen to the word of God and act out my love of God above and beyond everything else.

Now, I believe that the Bible is the word of God, that it's divinely inspired, that it's a great roadmap for us and a place where you need to start. But we as human beings have to be open to the world we live in and how it's different. How many of you remember a world without computers? Now, how many of you remember a slide rule? How many of you enjoyed doing logarithms on a slide rule? I knew Roger was odd and you are too. The fact of life is the world evolves and changes; science sees that, religion sees that. Our world has become different because of the fact of who we are and how we relate to one another.

I walked side-by-side with a man who has been in the news for the last week and a half or two weeks, all the time. He and I are both trying to hear each other's viewpoints along with our Jewish colleagues. Dr. Hirsute, who is the subject of great argument about an award he was given, and some people don't want him to have it because he has a mind of his own. We walk side-by-side, and we enter into a dialogue constantly trying to figure out where God is calling us, as a body of Jews, Christians, and people of Islam. We're trying to figure out where God is calling us to be and what God wants us to do in this world. Talk about these lessons of our actions, our hand. Ashley, you're God's hand. You, young man back there, you're God's heart. You my brother Jim, you are God's spirit and you carry it into the world wherever you go.

We're called to be the exemplar of the presence of the Holy in this world and that's what these lessons are about. I love the Lord because he had heard the voice of my supplication, because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I call upon Him, really an important part of our lessons for today. How many of you take time to speak so that God will hear? How many of you take time to do, other than on Sunday worship, your daily prayers? How many of you take time and listen for the Holy to speak in a certain way?

I said to a person today, and I've been praying about this for about a month and a half (a person in this congregation but I'm not saying who) and I said to them today: "Have you ever thought about being a Deacon?" That's pretty ominous when the Bishop says that to you. We're called to listen to the world of God; where did I get that? In my prayer life, in silence, in the holiness of that relationship where I'm open to my God, I listen for those voices over and over again. And then the voice comes and in my heart I hear, I can incorporate it into my mind, and then I move on. You can take that hat off if you want. That hat doesn't make me a Bishop. What makes me a Bishop is that I'm willing to listen to the presence of the Holy, and I want to thank you for being a good sport.

We are the people of God. We are waiting for the coming of heaven. I gotta tell you, you're losing a lot of time. The other day in a parking lot a guy said to me, "Pastor, I love the color of your shirt." I thought, you can have it if you want it, gimme me an aloha (I love aloha shirts). I said, "Why?" And he said: "Because it's the royal color of the kingdom of God." I said: "No, the color of your eyes and the color of our skin and the softness and gentleness in our touches, that is the color of the kingdom of God." Because I wear a cross around my neck or I wear purple doesn't mean that I've got a road to the kingdom of God, that I've got an inside track. I worry all the time whether I have an outside track. He said: "Don't you want to go to heaven?" I said: "I am in heaven." He said: "No, the streets of heaven are going to be paved with gold, the pillars are going to be pearls." That's not the heaven I want to go to. I want to go to a heaven where I'm in relationship with you. I want to go to a heaven where we all are intertwined with each other in such a way that our lives are transformed by who we have been and where we have gone.

How many of you remember the story of Moses, his parting of the Red Sea? What does the line say? He put his staff into the water and took a step; that's when the kingdom started because he was on a journey to the kingdom place. He was on a journey to that holy land, and guess what? When you and I move into belief and faith then we move into a place of understanding about heaven. How many of you grieve if you lose somebody? I grieve all the time. Two Sundays ago I talked with a lovely gal, named Mary Jane, who has been my friend for twenty years, she was eighty-four years old. We were talking excitedly about a special movie concert at the Hollywood Bowl that she, her nephew, my wife and I were going to see. For fifteen years we have been enjoying five Tuesdays each summer at the Bowl, sitting in a box that we share and laughing and playing. This past Sunday, several days after our night at the Bowl, Eddie and I, having arrived in separate cars, walked into church Eddie said, "Mary's been trying to get a hold of you, your phone's off. Mary Jane died." I was grieved. This was a woman I've loved and cared for my whole life. And you know why I was grieved? Because I won't be able to share her heaven here on earth. I won't be able to share the laughter, the droll sense of humor that she had. I won't be able to share the relationship that we had together where we're bonded in Christ Jesus here.

The kingdom has started. If you read the Greek, especially, the kingdom has started here and now, and so the part about works in here, we have to work to make this a better place to have God dwell, because God dwells in our hearts. Now do I believe that I'm going to go some place that's ethereal in heaven? I gotta bet you, I do. I'm going back to the bosom of God. I have this image, I think that he is God, and when I die I'm going to go right back to that enveloping well

of God. God's arms are going to be wrapped around me and my mother and my father and my grandmother and my grandfather and my cocker spaniels, my golden retriever, my collie that went before me, my wife will get there some day after me, and they'll be there and we'll all be enveloped in the love of God.

But in this world, I can start that heavenly place here and now. Yesterday was my son's birthday celebration, my baby, he's thirty-four but he's still my baby, he's 6 foot 7, and when I try to hold him on my lap it's a little difficult. We celebrated his birthday last night, and if there's one thing I like to do, it's eat good food in good restaurants. I made this beautiful reservation at a place called A'Kira in Pasadena. A'Kira is a fine Japanese/French restaurant with superb food, and I made this reservation for our whole family to go there. Lo and behold my son called me back and said: "Dad, you know I love you more than anything else in the world, but on my 34th birthday I don't want to go eat fancy food and have to dress up. I want to wear Tommy Bahama." I said: "OK, where do you want to go?" He said: "I've heard of this good restaurant, see if you can get a reservation there."

I called, but I'm not telling you the name of the place, because I'm going to malign it right now. I went to this place with my son, and it was terrible. But I was there because of my son, and because he is my son, he could have anything he wanted. He put his arm around me (it's pretty bad when your kid who is 34 can kiss you on top of the head without standing on tip-toe). He put his arm around my neck to hug me and says: "Dad, thanks, this was great, I love you but the food was rotten." I thought, there's one for Dad, but that was my son.

I want to take that image and turn it around, and there's a lot of things in my life that I don't do that are correct. A lot of time I stumble and I trip and fall because I'm not the perfect person God would have me to be. But I know that I'm going to put my arms around God's neck and say: "God, I did my darndest. I did the best that I could do, and I gotta tell you, heaven on earth was wonderful, and heaven with you is even better." We're called to be doers of the word because we believe, and we're so thankful for the presence of the Holy in our lives. Look at your grandbaby, and I bet you feel thankful. Look at the little one on your chest, and I bet you feel thankful, huh? That's how God looks at us and even though we go astray sometimes, God knows that in the long run we're going to get there.

The love of Jesus is like the enveloping arms of a father hugging his son. The enveloping love of God is a like a child looking up at his grandparent and thinking, wow, I love you Biggie, I love you Grandpa. The enveloping love of God is like my two and a half year old granddaughter calling me on the phone on Saturday afternoon saying to me: "Papa, Papa, I just finished my first week of preschool and my teacher is pretty. Thank you Papa." I didn't do anything. We are called to be the people of God acting out of a sense of, not the rules, but the love, the strength, the energy and that's how we'll be known. We won't have respect because we carry this staff or wear that silly hat, we won't be people who have respect because we have so much money we don't know what to do with it, we won't have respect because we're the best cook in the world even though I'd like to be, we have respect because we're in relationship with our God in such a way that the world is transformed by how we take that relationship and live it in the world.

I'm going to tell you that the best thing about being here today is the look on your faces as I have been preaching. I have been blessed by you. We are the people of God, ever active, ever present, here and now in this place at this time. We are seeking a new vision as we go forward and we're trying to figure out where we, as a body of Christ, want to go. We want to look back at all the abundance and all the power that has been behind us, and we're going to take it and channel it into a new place, and it's only going to happen if we do it. That's why I call you to be doers of the word today and not hurry down to the beach because its hot. Hurry into the hall over there and spend time thinking about what you want this place to be and how you want to help guide it. Be doers of the word, acting out the love of God in all that you undertake.

In Jesus' holy name. Amen