



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
6-28-15

Reading from Lamentations 3:21-33

I am a person of hope. I live with hope. And sometimes there are moments of grace that sweep me away filled with hope – like two days ago as I read and listened to the eulogy delivered by President Obama for the Rev. Clementa Pinckney and yesterday as I watched the livestream coverage as our new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry was introduced to the House of Deputies at the General Convention in Salt Lake City. Bishop Curry is a charismatic, bold, spirit-filled black man from North Carolina who brought tears to my eyes as he greeted the crowd. I quote just a few of his words from yesterday. “This is a good and wonderful church and we are good and wonderful people and we are so blessed. I know we’ve got a society with challenges and crises all around us – but we’ve got a God and there really is a Jesus and nothing can stop the movement of God’s love in this world! Nothing. And I share with you a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu – and he probably got it from Augustine or someone – this is a quote about God’s movement in the world. By Himself – God won’t, By ourselves – we can’t – But together with God we can and we will!

Together with God. Today’s sermon is about staying – staying with God, staying in reality, staying where we find ourselves right now – as it is expressed in Lamentations -staying, seeking hoping, listening, finding.

Desert Father Abba Moses said, “Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” Or another nameless brother said it a bit differently, “Go, sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls.” To talk about pledging my body to the walls is a decision to be where and who I am, knowing quite simply that this is the place where I shall meet God- the here and now of my actual humanity.

I spoke last week about fleeing – sometimes we think we can find something or someone better somewhere else, or we think we can run from our fears or struggles or neighbors or challenges. And I said that there are some things we should flee from – mostly our own useless words, decisions, habits, choices, and desire to create a world we can control.

Let me share another story from the desert fathers.

There was once a brother in a monastery who had a rather turbulent temperament; he often became quite angry. So he said to himself, “I will go and live on my own. If I have nothing to do

with anyone else, I shall live in peace and my passions will be soothed.” Off he went to live in solitude in a cave. One day when he had filled his jug with water, he put it on the ground and it tipped over. So he picked it up and filled it again – and again it tipped over. He filled it a third time, put it down and over it went again. He was furious; he grabbed the jug and smashed it. Then he came to his senses and realized he had been tricked by the devil. He said, “Since I have been defeated, even in solitude, I’d better go back to the monastery. Conflict is to be met everywhere, but so is patience, and so is the help of God.” So he got up and went back to where he came from.”

Conflict is to be met everywhere, but so is patience and so is the help of God. So we must stay – right where we find ourselves, right where we are. Former Archbishop Rowan Williams has said, “There is no goodness that is not bodily and realistic and local.” Goodness is contained in our bodies, right where we are, right in the midst of reality – in the midst of the real.

In fact, sometimes when Christian writers have tried to explain what it meant for Satan to revolt against God and fall from heaven, they have suggested that Satan preferred the idea of an unreal world in which he was in charge to a real world in which all glory was due to God. An unreal world in which he was in charge – that’s probably the world that Dylann Roof, the shooter in Charleston, SC wanted, that’s the world that all fanatics and terrorists want – to destroy and fight and kill thinking they can make the world fit their image – not God’s.

But back to new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry – “But we got a God and a Jesus – and there really is a Jesus – and nothing can stop the movement of God’s love in this world.”

So where does that leave us today – here in little old Pinedale? Here where you may or may not want to live. Here with the neighbors you may or may not like too much. Here with the simple talents that you may or may not want to share. Here we are. And we’ve got work to do – right here – right now – cause there is no goodness that is not bodily and realistic and local. And if we think we are isolated – we are not. We have every issue and challenge found in the world. Just this week I saw a local bumper sticker that says, “Don’t blame me – I voted for the white guy.” And if you think your words and actions don’t make much difference – think again. Every child that is eating at our summer lunches beams when they are greeted and fed – as do all when they are treated kindly.

Again, to quote Williams, “Here we are daily, not necessarily attractive and saintly people, along with other not very attractive and saintly people, deciding daily to recognize the holy of ourselves and each other as material for something unimaginably greater – the kingdom of God, the glory of the saints, reconciliation and wonder. (for) where we are and who we are is the furnace where the Son of God walks.”

That’s us – that’s you and me. Together and together with God we can and we will.

Thanks be to God.