

Sermon: John Autio Installation

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 26, 2017

Year A
Micah 6:6-8
Psalm 103:1-13
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 5:1-11

Bp. Houglund... Pastor John... Vestry and Council members... people of St. Paul's and Faith... and guests... it's a privilege to be here with you this evening... and to offer a Word... as you complete the second half of John's installation... begun on May 7... and formally welcome him... and Kathy... into St. Paul's community... and continue this new thing that the Holy Spirit is doing in and among both congregations... because I understand some of what you've gone through... some of the conversations you've had... the decisions you've made... and perhaps the heartache you've felt... that has brought you to this point... to this sharing of a pastor... I say it's a privilege... because I believe that what you are doing here... and in Sidney... is of God... and because the journey that God and I have been on... has helped me... I pray... see a little bit less... the way the world sees... and a little bit more... the way God sees...

You see... I grew up in a Jewish home... had a *Bar Mitzvah*... and was confirmed in synagogue... but I became so dazzled... by God's desire to be in relationship with us... by God's self-emptying incarnation... and sacrificial love-in-action on the cross... that on November 8, 1990... I became a Christian... and then an Episcopalian... and then a priest... and now I serve as the Rector / Pastor... or Pastor / Rector... depends I guess on who you ask... for a Lutheran congregation and an Episcopal one...

In some ways... it's easy to see the way the world sees... it's easy to gauge our effectiveness... by the size of our membership... or our average Sunday attendance... or the heartiness of our budgets... or the number of young families... but Jesus said that he came that we may have life... and have it more abundantly... not that we may have church... and have it more abundantly... so while some of you may see a certain necessity in sharing a pastor... I see a certain blessing... to which God is drawing all of

us... meaningful ministries... deeper relationships... fewer boundaries... and greater unity...

Now we all need *some* boundaries... we all need *some* limits... without them... there'd be chaos... without the boundary of a one-gallon container... milk would glug all over the bottom of the refrigerator... without denominational boundaries... it would be difficult to create the framework of our separate and shared... histories and journeys...

And because of those histories and journeys... I'm grateful to serve as the Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the diocese... affirming the legitimacy of other denominations... *and different faiths...*

But while there is striking evidence in creation... that God favors diversity... many churches are caught up these days... in a kind of denominational tribalism... asserting that only they are right... and others are wrong... that only their interpretation of scripture is true... and others are false... that what's normal for them... ought to be *normative* for everyone else... but diversity was never intended to be divisive... in fact... when I consider Jesus' desire that all may be One... the way he and the Father are One... I am even more convinced... that the divisions between us are lies...

And there is great unity... in our Christian tradition... and in the ties to our Jewish ancestors... you see... the Twelve Tribes of Israel were formed about 2,000 years before Jesus was born... and were composed of Jacob's sons and grandsons... these tribes would have worshipped gods who were bound to particular cities... gods whose influence and power ended at city walls... and there were serious rivalries between... not only cities... but between gods... like the kind of rivalry between Buckeyes and Wolverines... and there were arguments about whose god was better... more cunning... more powerful...

And these twelve tribes would have practiced sacrifice to appease their gods... but around 700 BCE... when Deuteronomy was written... there was a flash of light... a brilliant theological insight among the Jewish people...

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Hear O Israel... the Lord our God... the Lord is One...

They realized that there weren't many gods... who acted in the same capricious ways that they did... but that there was only One God... who created all things... sustained all things... loved all things... and redeemed all things... one God... who sought unity among God's people... who sought relationship and reconciliation... one God... who is intimately connected with... and ultimately invested in... all people... and who... as we just heard in Micah... asks us to do justice... and love kindness... and walk humbly with God...

Most of us understand humility... as false humility... as having a diminished view of our own importance... as in... *Oh... don't tell me how wonderful dinner was... I've made better...* but in The Road Less Traveled... M. Scott Peck described humility... as having a finely-tuned understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses... and when we walk humbly with God... we know who we are... and who we're not...

In tonight's Gospel... when Jesus had finished teaching... he told Simon Peter to put out into deep water... and let his nets down for a catch... Peter fussed... maybe he was exasperated... *We've been at this all night and have caught nothing... but if you say so... yes... I will...* and they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break...

Then Peter knew the jig was up... *Go away from me... Lord... for I am a sinful man...* and how did he know the jig was up... because Jesus didn't just say water... he said

deep water... and for psychotherapists and those who interpret dreams... deep water represents the unconscious... where things are hidden from view... where it's hard to see the bottom... but not hit bottom... Peter thought he knew how to fish... how to engage others in relationship... but maybe he wasn't going deep enough... maybe he was afraid of letting go of certain boundaries... but Jesus knew that when we cast nets into the deepest parts of ourselves... when we are open to deep sharing... deep relationship... and deep vulnerability... when we are real... we can catch so many people... that our nets will break...

But Jesus could see so deeply into Peter... past the things that Peter thought were hidden... and unperturbed... Jesus said... *Don't be afraid... from now on you'll be catching people...*

The (late) Rev. Walter Bouman was a Lutheran pastor... a professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Lutheran Seminary... and contributor to the Called to Common Mission Concordat... I didn't know him well... but heard him speak several times in Columbus, OH... before he passed on... and about this covenant... he wrote...

The agreement between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA is an example... it is an essential dimension of the mission of the church because it is a witness... that the Triune God is making One... what had previously been divided... and at times... even alienated...

If however... two denominations can recognize the authenticity of each other's teaching and practice... then they are required to understand how they have been given full communion with each other... and how they can be one church... when they are in the same place together... because each can represent the whole witness of the church on behalf of the other...

Failure to be in full communion with each other... he wrote... is sinful before God... because it means that denominations are simply brand names competing for a share of the Christian market...

Over and over in scripture... Jesus calls us to wake up... calls us into increasing awareness... calls us over and over into full communion... into deep water... into deeper relationship... and deeper vulnerability... we are called to know ourselves more and more... called to take on the mind of Christ... and I believe that while we must remember our stories... and honor our denominational differences... we are also called to be One... the way that Jesus and the Father are One...

People of St. Paul's... and of Faith... as you remain in conversation with Pastor John... and the synod and the diocese... and your bishops... and further navigate the issues and decisions which will come up... some which you'll anticipate... and some which may catch you off guard... remember above all... that you are waking up to unity... in the Body of Christ...

And as author James Blanchard said... *Once you awaken... you will have no interest in judging those who sleep...* and tonight... because of what's happening here... you are all waking up... Amen.

Mike+