

Sermon for Proper 27a 2020
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
November 8, 2020
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2020 continues to be quite a year: unexpected, aggravating, dangerous – or not, - and that’s just football! Add in a “too hot to handle” presidential and congressional elections. We are struggling to find community, faith, and truth. Where do we go from here? I bring you words from our bishop Andrew Waldo from our annual Diocesan convention, which was held via Zoom yesterday.

“Stuck in the darkness, who can bring help?

The times in which we now live have often felt dark; countless people have commented about feeling stuck in how to stay in relationship with people in their lives. And yet throughout this diocese ... you have persisted in working side by side in community ... continuing your worship of God with remarkable ingenuity, creativity and joy. We simply ache to be back together again.”

All of those words are true: we ache and long to be with one another in familiar ways, and we have been waiting for that time for months. None of us knows when our gathering in community might be simple and familiar. At the same time, we are gathering – a little in person, a lot via the technologies of the day: computers, telephones, and words exchanged in the mail. We persist, side by side in new configurations, a few of the old ones. We have called upon creativity in the name of our Lord, summoning joy into the darkness. As we have heard in many ways throughout our lives: “no one said it was going to be easy.”

Yesterday the bishop reminded us that “life in Christ is almost inevitably an adventure. There is always a risk ... and it is a risk rewarded with joy.”

We find ourselves waiting for joy ... and we will find it in Christ. We choose everyday who we will serve.

(Joshua) “Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. ... Choose this day whom you will serve ... put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”

We decide: the Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey. What is our risk in being a follower of Jesus? We worship in whatever ways we can:

Here

At home

During the day

Into the evening, into the darkness

with our hearts and minds and with all of our strength. It is not easy to follow Jesus in a world and in a time when those around us are looking for the next winner, the next loser, and that proclaims power and knowledge in all of the “little ‘g’ gods” we hold dear. “Little ‘g’” gods tell us that we in our humanity are in charge, that the world is scary, resources are scarce, and we must be better than “they” are.

In reality, the world is scary, resources are abundant, and those who are last will be first in the kingdom of God

Just as importantly, darkness is not dark to God; the darkness is as bright as the day. We do not sit in darkness, either, because as we saw last week in the sacrament of baptism, we each carry the light of Christ (in our baptismal vows). We are given that light in dying to this world, rising to new life in Christ, in being marked and claimed by Jesus, by carrying the light of the one who lives with us in that new life. Jesus is here – in you, in me, and with the words of our bishop, in people “whose politics we hate and whose habits annoy us.” As flawed as each of us is, we are children of God, loved and carrying the light of Christ. We take a risk when we let go of (uncharitable) assumptions ... and there is suddenly room for movement, for light in the darkness ... to offer the hope that is within us. We pour hope, creativity, and strength into a world that needs Christ’s light. We are the ones called to recognize that light in each other.

So:

We join the bridesmaids in waiting for Jesus, and in preparing for his return in the best ways that we can. Along the way ...

We all fall asleep. Following Jesus is hard work. Those who are prepared and those whose preparations fall short still tire of waiting for Jesus. We have been waiting for 2,000 years. Do WE have enough oil – that which is inside of us, to bear the light of Jesus Christ? Jesus thought so, thought that we do have enough to shine even the dimmest bit of light into the darkness that we experience –

Because we have hope

And the creativity

And the strength

To find Jesus in every one

because we already have the light of Christ and it will not be hidden. Even a flicker of Jesus is still Jesus. We light the way to the party to which we have been invited, bearing Christ while we still seek him.

Our charge and our call is

To live as if the resurrection is true/Truth,

Because it is.

Our charge and our call is to live as if we are carrying even a little bit of the light of Christ,

Because the resurrection is truth, and

Because we are the light of Christ in this world.

And so we come to the party. The Jesus party.

Christ, be with us.

God our refuge and strength,

You have bound us together in a common life;

Help us, in the midst of our present conflict

To confront one another without hatred or bitterness

To listen for your voice and competing claims

And to work together with mutual forbearance and respect;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer Book for Australia, The Anglican Church of Australia Trust Corporation, p. 202.