

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

July 12, 2015; the 7th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-19.

A Plan for the Fullness of Time

The Letter to the Ephesians sets forth a vision for living.

It is a vision of hope and promise, based on our experience of the risen life that we know in part now as baptized persons, members of the Body of Christ...the communion we have with our risen Savior often experienced in relationship with each other and when we help the poor and outcast, is an initial sharing in eternal life that we will one day know in its fullness.

The letter states, “we set our hope on Christ that we might live for the praise of his glory.”

Ephesians presents the life of grace, a life shaped by the power of God rather than the powers of darkness.

We live this life of grace as part of God’s “plan for the fullness of time,” when all things are “gathered up” in God, “things in heaven and things on earth.” (as it states in Ephesians)

The life of grace is an experience of knowing something of eternal life now...being a part now of God’s “plan for the fullness of time.”

We who have known something of the power of grace in our lives are, like the author of Ephesians, called to live that vision and share that vision.

Sometimes we see it...right in front of us...love wins...divisions are overcome, wounds are healed, new days dawn.

The arc of the moral universe bending toward justice, as Dr. King said.

It is long, and sometimes we don't see the bend, but sometimes we do. We saw it at General Convention with full marriage equality coming to the Episcopal Church...and the election of Bishop Michael Curry to be our next presiding bishop; on November 1st he will be installed, and he will be the first African-American ever to be presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

Sometimes we see it.

But then we have a day such as the one described in the Gospel reading. Into this pleasant day in July, comes a story of great darkness, but it is a story with which we are familiar, for it is a story of power, struggles for power, choosing what is wrong instead of what is right, it is the story of an innocent dying at the hands of the rich and the powerful.

Herod had been criticized by John the Baptist for marrying his brother's wife, which angered his wife.

Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist because he knew that the people revered him and Herod also considered him holy and righteous.

But then the party, the drinking, then the promise...that whatever his daughter wanted would be given her.

On the bidding of her mother the daughter asks for the head of John on a platter.

Do you hear the similarities to the account of Pilate sending Jesus to the Cross...the pressure of others...but ultimately, one man's decision, and he chooses wrongly.

In the drama that is the life of the world... the pressures of the world, the darkness of the world, often have their way...

and we feel those pressures too...we know the darkness....

motivators to act, or not to act, because of fear, intimidation, the systems of oppression that seem so strong...but we have been called to

another way.

Another vision

Another life, in fact,

a different life..for the gift of grace offered to us, frees us to live in the light, to live the life of Christ...not an easy life...but a true life...a true life devoted to God, to the way of God, the way of Jesus...we are called to be part of, what our new presiding-bishop elect Michael Curry calls, “the Jesus Movement.”

We are part of something...something big...the Jesus Movement.

As Karen Chakoian states in her commentary on this passage from Ephesians, “the language of Ephesians is not individualistic. As beloved as we are, we are lifted up into something far greater than ourselves.

We are blessed in Christ, we are chosen in Christ, we are destined for adoption through Christ....

this gift... is always for the community of Christ.”¹

For we, plural, are Christ’s Body...hands and heart in the world; we are the Jesus’ movement.

It is in our faith community, when we come together and when go out from here, that we support each other, through prayer, fellowship, companionship in this way, so that we can be Christ for others.

This is a movement that cannot stopped.

As people learn more and more about about us, people want to join.

¹ Bartlett, David L. and Taylor, Barbara Brown., General Editors. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 3, Pentecost and the Season after Pentecost*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. Epub. Karen Chakoian, Loc. 8269 of 13935.

From Twitter this week, a person wrote that in the shoe store the person assisting her right after General Convention - "You Episcopalian? I read about your marriage equality, plus I know y'all feed the poor.

How can I be one?"²

The Jesus Movement...when we display our faith in ways that people can see, the Movement grows.

During General Convention, I heard Bishop Curry tell a story, one I've heard him tell before, and I realized this time, that story is about a moment in his life when he knew...when God touched him and helped him to know what he was to be about...in a powerful way.

The story is of a funeral; when Curry was a priest in Baltimore during a time of terrible gang wars...he presided at the funeral of a young man maybe 18 or 19...and when the funeral was ending, one of the young men who was there, probably a fellow gang member, put his hand on the coffin, and said, "See ya real soon."

And it hit Bishop Curry hard...that this young man 18, 19, 20...that was the best thing that man could say about the future.

That one experience spoke to Bishop Curry about the tragedy that life can be and that we are called to be about something entirely different.

That through Christ, everyone is called to be about something entirely different...and we who are in the Jesus movement now, we show forth that difference in the world and invite others to join us, in a movement about love, inclusion, justice, authenticity, vulnerability, healing, and hope.

In a world full of death...we point to life, through the grace of God.

And God wants everyone in this movement...because only you are able to

² Dawn Allen-Herron @Dawnese, 7/3/15

be for God in this world the way you can be...that is how important you are to God, and God loves you.

Bishop Curry was elected at General Convention and three others were not.

I have a special compassion for those who are not elected in Church elections...having been in an Episcopal election once, and obviously was not elected.

I bring this up because our passage from Ephesians has often been seen as addressing the theological topic of "election."

Throughout Christian history there have been theological arguments about who is elected and who is not, who is called or not.

One of the grace-filled experiences that I had in the process of not-being-elected, was my sense of God saying, everyone is elected, called to be part of the movement,

to serve, to know the life of grace.

And an image came to me at that time...how great it would be if, say 700 people were to show up at your house, my house, everyone's house and elect you to what God is already calling you to be and to do...and have party...congratulate you...and tell you how wonderful you will be in God's call to you, not because you are perfect, but because you are the only one who can do what God is calling you to do, and God will give you the grace necessary for the calling.

Wouldn't that be something?

Cause let me tell you, it is a big deal to have 700 people show up to vote on your life...it is hard to miss that...it is intense.

Through prayer and reflection, you might want to give that a try.

Imagine in prayer...that 700 or more people show up at your home, to elect you...you might pray about something you are already doing, or something that you think God is calling you to, or

you could even ask the voters...what are you electing me to do or be?

That sort of focused intensity and desire for you to know that you are elected, is what God has for you...that you and I are part of the Jesus Movement and that is important, essential in this world....part of God's plan for the fullness of time.

Amen.