

“A Call to Arms”
Sermon for the First Sunday after Pentecost
N. Farnham & St. John’s Episcopal Churches
June 7, 2020 – The Rev. Torrence Harman

The Church calls today Trinity Sunday. Given our passages appointed for today it feels more like “Farewell Sunday.” And in a way it truly is as we cross over into Ordinary Time – the longest period in our liturgical year – with Paul and Jesus taking leave of their “congregations.” Two thousand years later we are crossing over into a time that definitely is not “ordinary.” And we do so as the heat of summer and the heated emotions all around envelop us.

In our passages today we have good-bye speeches by Paul and Jesus – both of whom well knew traumatic times. They are taking their leave of us just when it seems we really need them to stay around, walk with us, talk us through the societal traumas our times are presenting.

What do they have to say? Listen to Paul’s final words in the final passage of his Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace and the God of love and peace be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Now listen to the final passage of the final chapter of Matthew’s Gospel offering Jesus’ final words to his disciples as he “ascends” back from where he came.

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Both Paul and Jesus are giving out “marching orders.” How to go forth as Christ followers. Then and now.

So how are we doing, folks? Today! What do we think about these words about living in love, about a life of “making disciples” and teaching them everything that Jesus commanded, which basically boils down to “love one another as I have loved you.” These words startle and confront us in the middle of what is going on around us. Christianity still boasts as the largest number of self-identifying “followers” of any faith tradition worldwide as well as here in the U. S. But as we read these “marching orders” what is obvious two thousand years later is that while the

numbers of those calling themselves Christ followers has exponentially increased we may have clothed ourselves with the label but the message isn't even skin deep.

This is not to say that there are no remarkable Christ like things going on now. Compassion, reaching out, efforts to try and heal woundedness, many searching for and trying out ways to cure the societal dis-eases that rear up and plague us so terribly from time to time. Tragically, some diseases never seem to get eradicated, never seem to go away but simply sink back deep inside folks incubating until the time is ripe for reemergence. Thankfully today there are many on the front lines trying to combat the societal diseases that are wrecking havoc on our communal health. Back on the "home front" many of us are doing what we can to help – praying, breathing in peace, breathing out love, breathing in love, breathing out peace.

However, opposing forces are trying their best to dominate the landscape, breathing in fear, breathing out hate, breathing in hate, breathing out violence. Forces either directly confronting peaceful efforts at transformation with lethal win/lose tactics or extremists working within any movement to incite internal turmoil that will boil over like molten lava of an erupting volcano. This may sound extreme but our landscape is like a war zone. Those who hoped to incite civil unrest or simply use unrest for their own purposes are working tirelessly to corrupt the peaceful transformation that is so desperately needed to heal some of our wounded systems and unhealthy community structures that diminish rather than enhance life. The guns may have plastic or rubber bullets, the tear gas may disappear quickly, but the harm hangs in the air we breathe long past the dispersing of crowds. It sinks deep into our souls, because what we are experiencing in our landscapes is spiritual warfare.

Where, oh where is our Christ leader now after his final good-byes and his disappearing act on a mountaintop in Galilee? Just what does that "Remember, I am with you always to the end of the age" really mean? And how can we access Christ's "always with us-ness" now to lead us onward: forward, through and beyond this time, hopefully coming out on the other side with love in heart, peace of mind and abundance of spirit with the fewest fatalities humanly possible for all involved whether they were on the side for or against love and peace.

The vision of "Trinity" emerges. The "unity" of Father, Son and Holy Spirit offers a universal "bigness" beyond our wildest imaginations. So broad, so deep, so high, so immense that we cannot fathom it. And yet so intimate we cannot escape it – as close and in, around, through us as the air we breathe, as the blood coursing through our veins, pumped by our heart held within the heart of God. When we open to the idea of this amazing Divine, we access the strength, the courage, the faith that such a universal, positive, creating, loving all in One power can transform us and the world around us, carrying us along steadily within its deep flowing current. Christ says good-bye to us as Jesus to become fully, absolutely ONE with the immense Divine Reality that created us, sustains us, redeems and makes us new over and over again and becomes pure energy to transform us into the human image of God which we were designed to become as a beloved of God. At this time, this still point on the cusp of the Divine working within our human struggles of spirit to transform and make some old things healthy and renewed there is a Divine

voice reaching out to us – it is a call to arms in the midst of spiritual warfare. A call for the arms of our heart, mind and spirit to respond to Divine desire to re-order what is dis-ordered, that a new order may be put in place. And if we listen and respond to that call, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit will be with us to guide us home through to the end of the age. Onward, Christian . . . !

By One Amazing Grace, may it be so

Torrence