

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Proper 29-A (22 November 2020)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

The Rev. Todd Foster

Time-stamp: <2020-11-19 Thu 10:39>

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24, Psalm 100, Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46

1 Beginning: Once upon a time...

Here we are at the end of the liturgical year. We've gone through all the seasons, told the whole story of the Gospel as best we could within the confines of a single year. And a very strange, disorienting year it has been!

After all the seasons have been observed, all the holidays celebrated, all the Scriptures read, our collect today summarize pretty well what it's all about. Our God is the *King of kings and Lord of lords*. And God's intention is to bring to God's creation freedom and unity. That is God's intent for us. That is the purpose of the liturgical year, the purpose of all the holidays, the purpose of the Holy Scriptures, the purpose of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church. That is the purpose of our gathering here today and every week. It's even the purpose of our pledging. Our purpose is to recognize God as Lord over all, including our own inclinations, and to open our hearts to receive the good gifts of freedom and unity that God intends. Or, as Jesus summarized it, we gather to learn how to seek first the Kingdom of God.

2 Middle: Tension: destabilizing

Our second reading today, from the epistle of Paul to the church in Ephesus, is well-chosen. Paul writes to a community he has not met in person: he has only heard about them through the testimony of others. He has heard of their faith and of their love. And Paul's goal is to make sure that they enjoy equally the hope that is promised to every Christian. Because, what a hope it is! It is to "know what is the hope to which [God] has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."¹

And how do we attain to this kind of hope that surpasses everything else? Paul prays for the Ephesians, Paul prays for us, that God will give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

¹Eph 1.18bf. NRSV

Wisdom is a kind of practical knowledge of reality, it is knowledge that has real-world effects. Wisdom is the proclamation of the Gospel that was handed down from person to person, from the very apostles, until it reached your ears. Wisdom is embedded in the Holy Scriptures, that have been crucial to keeping God's people on track even as the winds of the times have pushed us to and fro. Wisdom is found in the traditions of the church such as the liturgical calendar, the Feasts and Fasts, the Holy Eucharist, and the Book of Common Prayer. Wisdom is found in our practices of prayer, of service, of study, and of giving.

Now, I was supposed to be preaching on stewardship today. The specific theme I was assigned is 100% participation: to encourage every single member of St. Thomas' to participate by submitting a pledge that makes sense for you and your situation. That works because a pledge is not just about paying the bills around St. Thomas', though pledges are critical to that. Pledges are just one more example of the wisdom passed down to us through the generations. Pledging isn't just for clergy or for vestry or for exceptional Christians. Pledging, like prayer, like worship, like partaking of the Holy Eucharist, is for all of us, every single one of us. It is one more example of the wisdom of the church that seeks to draw us to God.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is for wisdom *and revelation*. When we take advantage of the wisdom passed down to us, the practices through which we learn how to seek first the Kingdom of God, *then*, says Paul, *then* we will experience the *revelation* of knowing God. *Then* the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened so that we can perceive God's power in our lives, that very same power that even raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Have you ever seen any other power like that? Can you imagine anything that such power could not overcome? It is a power "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come."² It is a power greater than your creditors. It is a power greater than addiction. It is a power greater than cruelty. It is a power greater than racism or white supremacy. It is a power greater than climate change. It is a power greater than nuclear weapons. It is a power greater than Covid-19.

3 End: Now / not yet; Because God... therefore...

That, in the end, is why St. Thomas' Episcopal Church exists. You don't get points with God for coming to church. Showing up doesn't make you a good person. But we gather as a community to share with each other our own wisdom, that which has been passed down to us, as we invite one another, all of us, 100% participation, to engage in those wise practices that will prepare us and predispose us to perceive the revelation of God powerfully at work in our lives.

God may be the Creator of the universe, sovereign over all, the God of unfathomable power – yet all that power and all that intentionality is aimed at you like a healing arrow. That is the power that frees us from every lesser thing and unites us in our common humanity, our common belovedness, our common citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Amen.

²Eph 1.21 NRSV