

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: August 21, 2022

“We Need Religious Compassion”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost. I would like to share a story with you that happened several years ago working in hospice. It is a reminder that sometimes religious rites can cause harm, you know, the thing Jesus is always demonstrating.

I was assigned a Jewish family that was from Israel. The husband, a man in his mid- forties was ill from a strange disease that mimicked Parkinson’s but was also different. This gentleman was an airplane mechanic and over the years had probably been exposed to numerous toxic gases and waste resulting in this strange disease.

The family had moved to the Bay Area about four years prior to needing hospice and they were tied to a very Orthodox Jewish Temple and organization, as they were truly Hebrew, Jewish Israelis. As I met with the wife (a few years younger than her husband - who was our patient) and their two boys 8 and 12 years old, I learned a lot about how their Jewish sect observed the Sabbath.

It was explained to me that all the hospice staff needed to be done with their visits on Friday by one in the afternoon because the family needed to prepare for the Sabbath. Extra meals were cooked, because on Saturday they would not use the stove. Homework for the children needed to be done because they did not turn on lights and only religious reading would be done in the daylight on Saturday.

And of course, no use of computer, phone, or any technology, no TV. This family has lived like this all their lives, and all in the honor of God, as they understand their tradition to be.

I eagerly listened to their stories, and admired their conviction, until I saw their beautiful heritage causing harm. Our patient, the husband, over several weeks began to become contracted and unable to move in the bed on his own, which, can cause bedsores, infections and other issues. This is not unknown to those who deal with dying bodies, so a special bed and mattress was ordered.

This bed and mattress have an airflow that allows the bed to inflate and deflate throughout the day, preventing pressure from building up on the skin, hopefully to prevent sores. But there is a catch. It is, after all electric!

This meant our patient could be comfortable six days a week, however, on day seven, his wife would need to turn his body in the bed and change the pillow positions around his limbs every two hours for twenty-four hours because they do not use electricity on the Sabbath.

Does anyone see the Gospel story here? Well, of course, the gentleman died within the course of six months, and his wife dutifully turned him, and provided excellent care. I was able to provide her safe space to vent her grief, and was allowed to partake in some of their after-death rituals. Her faith never wavered, but mine did a little bit, but that is not the issue presented here today in the Gospel, or in my little hospice story.

The issue is asking the question of whether your faith, culture, religion, or political stance is making you lose your compassion. Would a God of Creation, of this amazing Universe, expect of you any less than to love your neighbor, love creation, to be compassionate, more than worry about what day of the week something is done, not done, eaten, not eaten, or prayed?

Is it God who creates a spirituality that harms his own creation? Or is the God created in the mind of man, the one that has a base in fear and vengeance making us believe God would object to healing a person on a Sabbath day, or leaving the electricity on for the last six months of a very God-loving devout family as they cared for their loved one.

It seems clear to me that I am standing in a room filled with gifted people. Some of you have done ministry since before I was driving my first car. Some of you hold degrees, are artistic in your own right, and some have attended seminary or some other form of advanced ministry. We are all part and parcel of a collective community. We can, should, and do think for ourselves.

And the Episcopal church admires that. I love our rituals, I love our church history, and yes, I know we have participated in some atrocious things, but that's just it. We, the Episcopal church, are in the fast moving-forward lane to attempt to right what is wrong, even if we are only at the acknowledgment part right now.

That being said, we are called to look at the way God would call us in our tradition and in our personal lives to move forward with compassion. We need to look at the way we used to do things, and view our next steps toward a more compassionate

church. We need to continue to educate ourselves in our own histories and those of others to get a better understanding of the world we live in now.

But this is not only a call to the church. It is also a personal call to take review of your life, your worship, your prayer life, and see what is working. What do we want to add to help grow more compassionate? What do we need to rid ourselves of, because it no longer serves us?

Our religious zealots in today's Gospel cannot see that healing someone on the Sabbath would be exactly the work of the Messiah, the work of God, because it is the compassionate thing to do. This is also the very same reason Jesus was crucified. Compassion over the letter of the law, truly loving God and loving neighbor.

Jesus as the way and the truth reveals to us a God that sees the worth of this woman to heal her. This shows us God sees our worth, and heals us as we are able to accept it, at any time it is possible. This reading shows us Jesus cares more for the struggling woman than his tradition, or practicing the letter of the law.

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness, as we are also called to be. Amen