

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church      Pinole, CA

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: July 18, 2021

“We are Family”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning everyone. I hope everyone is doing well and I would like to start our reflection today with a little bit of a song.

*“We are family*

*I got all my sisters with me*

*We are family*

*Get up everybody and sing (sing it to me”)      Sister Sledge*

That’s my reflection on our Epistle reading. As simple as those words might seem in the lyrics of a song, the actual concept of living out those words (which exemplify that each and every one of us is a child of “God our creator” with no exception) is, as you may have noticed, seemingly impossible.

Our Epistle explains to us “For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

My question to you this morning, as we all sit here trying to grow our souls – is have you broken down the dividing wall between you and others? Have you left any hostility in the past? Have you let go of what keeps you from experiencing the joy and also the pain of others? There have been many who have asked the question of how do I actually do that? So let’s reflect.

Since we are honoring the others in acceptance today, I would like to bring to you a reading that a friend reminded me of as I thought about today’s reflection. I give you Ram Dass:

*“When you go out into the woods, and you look at trees, you see all these different trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight, and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and you allow it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand that it didn’t get enough light, and so it turned that way. And you don’t get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree. The minute you get near humans, you lose all that. And you are constantly saying ‘You are too this, or I’m too this.’ That judgment mind comes in. And so I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are.”*

This reading from Dass is truly a reflection of how Jesus looked at those around him. We see so many times in scriptures Jesus trampling over traditions to be compassionate to others. We are called to model that and it is not easy. In fact, although Dass’ suggestion to compare people to a natural element which as we know holds both no perfection in absolute perfection (which is God’s work); we are the same – perfect in our non-perfection. But those judgment issues in this quote do not delve into the true source of what makes us struggle loving others. Recently our redwood deck doors had the glass smashed leaving us with no reason why - except maybe to get inside to steal. The windows are fixed now, and I am glad to say during the process we attached a note to the plywood prior to repair openly forgiving whoever did the damage. My heart swells with joy that those words were up there. If you saw the e-news picture of the incident, you will see posted:

“We forgive the person who broke our windows and we ask God to bring peace to this troubled soul.”

So beautiful, and without a relationship to this person, should I say maybe a little easier than that sister or brother, cousin, neighbor, possible co-worker. Maybe it is your kids, or dare I say your partner who seems to just get to you by putting you in a judgmental stance.

This is when we are called to prayer and reflection, as often the critique of someone else is partly a reflection of something that happened to us: a possible trauma, or maybe the judgment we make reminds us of the part of us we really don't want to admit we are. When we have fear of another, we need to ask is that real fear, or something taught or even an assumption due to generalizations? If we truly believe Christ to be the savior of the world, we have to include the world. Whether you look at the diversity of the trees or the diversity of the people and cultures around us, we are all created in the image of Divinity.

In our Gospel reading today, we have that example of honoring being human and divine. We have Jesus who knows and understands his disciples need rest. I bring this up because spiritual work can be tiring. You would think things like meditation and prayer would energize you, and sometimes it does. But other times it can lead into deep reflection, painful memories, and feelings of insecurity. Because we too are – should I say, “one of those trees” - maybe bent, stunted, odd or old, and we judge ourselves - which then makes it alright to judge another.

Loving and forgiving our “neighbor” has to begin with ourselves. It is not enough to know God forgives you or that Jesus understands, it is not enough to have the priest give absolution if your heart is stone and you are unable to receive it. And the journey to feeling forgiven may begin with rest.

Our global, worldly, country and state continues to be in struggle as a pandemic, climate change, and all the stuff we are bombarded with daily takes space in our minds. It is alright if you feel tired; it is alright to rest; and when rest is done, just as Jesus and the disciples did, you move on toward serving others through the gifts God has given you.

Our Gospel ends stating all who touched Jesus were healed. You who are here right now have been touched by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is

healing for you. Some of that healing comes in the form of accepting self and others as part of the Divine. Or in other words, as a tree amongst a forest.

“For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” Again I ask, is there peace in your heart? Are the dividing walls coming down? Is the hostility being let go?

Today and this week, when going forth to love and serve the Lord, remember, “We are family,” then go out and be a tree. Amen