

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Father's Day and Juneteenth: June 16, 2024

The Spirit is Still Speaking (Juneteenth)

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on Father's Day and also Juneteenth celebration Sunday. In today's scriptures we see that Jesus has gone to the Synagogue and has been invited to read from the Torah. It is also mentioned that this was a familiar place for him, having gone there since his youth. Yet Jesus, at this moment, is not the same Jesus just prior to now. This scene is set after Jesus' baptism and the temptation in the desert.

This leads us to the beginning of today's reading, where Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee and then to Nazareth. Also something must have changed in him because a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. Jesus was preaching and teaching, no longer the simple carpenter or boy who read in the synagogue. Jesus was fully in the spirit as he opened the scroll to read, and the Spirit spoke.

The main activity of the Spirit's purpose in speaking is "bringing good news to the poor." So the captives, the blind, and the oppressed are all people who are in some sort of poverty, and Jesus is now being sent to them by the Spirit of the Lord to not just say good things, but to enact good things for them. Those on the margins, those who were considered to have no worth.

The captives are declared released, the oppressed are sent to their freedom, and by the mere use of words, the blind are given back their sight. Everyone hears that it is the moment of the Lord's favor. In other words, the

words of God have power to change things because the Holy Spirit is at work through these words.

Today Jesus declares he is the physical manifestation of God in the world - trying to demonstrate the goodness that God had always planned for humanity (no matter how far we stray.) Including the very thought that one could own another person not out of owing a debt, but of ownership as in livestock.

Right here in today's readings Jesus is telling us in plain language that the prophets have explained God has promised humanity a good life, however we sin against each other which allows suffering into the world. Archbishop Curry states, "if it is not about love, it is not about God". It is never God who turns away. Jesus is saying, don't only listen to my words, but watch and see what I will do. I will model to you the love that God has for you, it was never about righteous law, but instead about right relationship. And as we know, Jesus heals many and saves lives who society would rather have stoned.

So today we celebrate Juneteenth - a time to remember the freeing of the captives, and while that sounds wonderful, we know it was only the beginning of other issues too complicated to go into more deeply. But I feel today is the right day to share a bit of our Episcopal history. Today the Spirit is speaking. I share with you now information developed by the Subcommittee on Reparations Racial Justice Commission on November 2021. As the Episcopal Church strives to make the Gospel a more real and tangible thing in the world, know we are a work in progress.

I also ask you to understand that for the most part, people thought they were doing good. It is only with the present knowledge can we begin to understand the consequences of our actions as we clearly discover more and more that the Gospel is truly about love and relationships rather than righteous law. As the saying goes: *Learn more, Do better.*

As most of us have learned, the Episcopal Church not only did not question slavery (unlike most other American denominations), it also acquiesced to the establishment of legalized segregation after the Civil War. And continued to treat African American Episcopalians as second-class Christians as seen by their previous Convention non-voting status.

While a particular congregation as a whole or individuals within a congregation might not have owned slaves, the economic system of slavery was broad and encompassing. There were banks that provided loans and mortgages on enslaved persons; insurance companies which offered insurance policies; and ships and shipping companies that engaged in the transatlantic slave trade. There were also secondary economic impacts such as the textiles that fueled the industrial rise in northern states—all produced by the slave system.

This systemic racism that shaped the Episcopal Church also shaped American society, particularly in the ways society denied African Americans economic opportunities that were provided to whites. Two veterans returning from World War II who identically served their country would experience very different economic opportunities depending on their race. If you would like to read more details on what the Episcopal church is doing to address our sins you may look at [diomass.org](http://diomass.org) on reparations.

In Christian theology, there have traditionally been three aspects and elements of repentance and right relationship and I would like to share with you where the Episcopal church is now.

– First, the need to acknowledge the wrong. The historical background presented to you today is from an official Episcopal church document. This document presents details of the church's ambivalence and participation in the wrongs of slavery and racism – acknowledging this wrong is an aspect of the first step.

– Second, to repent and be truly sorry and express remorse. The Episcopal Church, on the churchwide level, has issued formal apologies for slavery and at present is considering reparations.

–Third, the need to take steps to right the wrong. This is an essential and integral component of repentance. This is why the sacrament of confession often contains a penance: not as a punishment, but as an outward sign and an action towards restorative justice. Restorative justice is a legal, ethical, and theological concept where we do not just acknowledge a wrong, but take tangible, active steps towards righting that wrong.

As those who participate in the leadership of this church know, there is a component of learning about church history and racism, which is presented by the Diocese. There is now a racial oversight committee to look into what needs to be changed.

The church (just as our own lives) is far from perfect. But we, as followers of Jesus, are to continue his teachings which include releasing the captives and bringing good news and hope to the poor; all while trying to have healing relationships with each other. The Spirit never stops speaking on behalf of those on the margins. We are called to live in love, Happy Father's Day and Juneteenth. Amen