

Sermon

Pentecost 4 Year C July 7, 2019

Saint Mark's Episcopal Church

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when you approach someone that you are meeting for the first time you immediately feel a bad vibe; something is not right, and you feel repelled in that encounter? By the same token, we also experience those first meetings with people where we right away feel welcomed; there is a sense of goodness, charity and peace.

Several months ago, Ellen and I went to Paige's Okra Grill for lunch. As we were waiting for a table, I saw one of my former parishioners from a couple of parishes ago. When we greeted her, she lit up with a big smile as we hugged. She then introduced us to her adult daughter, who when she approached me, I felt myself literally step backwards because of all of the bad vibes that were

coming from her. Within minutes, I learned that she was a member of one of the big churches here in Charleston that left the Episcopal Church, and of course I, as a priest that has remained faithful to the Episcopal Church, was the recipient intentionally or unintentionally of all of that negative energy. Within the fields of science and psychology, there are well thought out theories about the fact that there exists both positive and negative fields of energy in the universe. And, I believe that this is what Jesus is addressing with his disciples in this morning's Gospel from Luke.

Jesus said, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in that same house...But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.'"(Luke 10) Now you like me, have for sure never said something like this aloud. However, I know that I would have loved to have said this outside of the restaurant and wiped the dust off my feet in that encounter. And yet, in a way I did just that, I moved on, and this is an important teaching for all of us as we seek to spread the love and teachings of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

Church historian, Bart Ehrman, in his 2018 book, The Triumph of Christianity, writes of the dramatic growth of the Christian Church following Jesus' earthly life and teachings. He writes: "The following gives a rough estimate of the number of Christians at key moments of the movement, starting right at its beginning immediately after Jesus' death: 30 CE—20 Christians, 60 CE—1,000-1,500, 100 CE—7,000-10,000, 150 CE—30,000-40,000, 250 CE—600,000-700,000, 312 CE—3.5 million-4 million; and, 400 CE—25 million-35 million Christians."

Earlier within that same Gospel passage Jesus had said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." The business of bringing others to the love of Jesus and the church is not just mine, but ours. Jesus is speaking to all of us who follow him as Lord and Savior; that, we are to be about both living and spreading his message of the kingdom of God. And yet, at the same time Jesus reminds us that we should not worry about the encounters where the message of Jesus' love is not well received—you see, the harvest is plentiful even in these secular times within which we live in the 21st century. We are called to remain faithful and persistent in our efforts. There are many out there hungering for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And within our personal lives there is a message in this Gospel as well. Do you presently spend time on a relationship where your love and personhood are not well received? I know that from my own experience I have tried to maintain relationships with folks who despite all of my efforts, did not respond or reciprocate. This for me has happened with former parishioners whom I thought as well were friends. Yet, when I was no longer their priest, the relationship ended abruptly despite my efforts. Have you had such an experience in life? I suspect that most of you could name at least one. And since you have chosen to live in the love and light of Christ, then you are encouraged by Jesus to move on...move on as there are so many more out there.

So perhaps, what Jesus is speaking to us today is to stay in the positive energy fields. Do not spend time in the negativity, of which there is so much today. Share the love and acceptance of Jesus with everyone in your life and those whom you meet. Invite them to this way of living and to the church. And when you are not well received, well, just move on...Amen+