



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

September 23, 2007

Proper 20C

Rev. Donna Barr

How many of you have been sitting here this morning thinking.....Donna and Alan have really messed up today! They have gotten the service backwards. Did you notice how they read the scriptures in reverse order? The Gospel, Epistle and then Old Testament. Well, I do hope you noticed because I really intended it to be in reverse order today. In a few minutes I will tell you the method of my madness, but I do hope that this change did not divert you from listening to these interesting words from God.

The readings for this day contain an extraordinary theme. Amos describes God pressing a serious charge against his people for oppressing the poor and seeing religion as an annoying inconvenience. The Epistle reading in 1st Timothy speaks about ending anger and quarreling as marks of the godly life. The Gospel reading in Luke speaks of a labor dispute in which a dishonest worker maneuvers his way into winning friends among his employer's debtors. Some form of quarrel or controversy appears in all the readings. The resolution offered in all three passages is also remarkably similar: God recruits the prophet to plead on behalf of the poor and needy; Timothy recruits the community for a vocation of holiness; and the crafty worker fiddles with the books to recruit sympathy for himself.

My explanation for reversing these scriptures was simply to connect these passages to our Christian life, our journey to God, and our call to discipleship and vocation.

Beginning with the Gospel, I pictured many stories of faith which begin with shrewd and crafty management. Stories where people are saved from self-righteousness, narrow mindedness, selfishness and greed. These are the crisis times of our lives. The place where we begin to ask the faith questions and the meaning of life. The word crisis in Chinese means a dangerous opportunity. Dangerous, because we could overlook the importance of our chance to change and the most opportunity if we risk the surrender. The manager in our Gospel does have a chance to turn from his ways and be changed and can move forward on his journey to God.

Going farther on our Christian walk, involves more growth and development. It involves conversion and transformation, a radical turning of self toward God. "I have been crucified with Christ, proclaims the Apostle Paul, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Timothy encourages us to make personal commitments to others; to live a holy and dignified life. We increase our spiritual life only by sharing our selves with one another. And so we move on in our walk, literally making the church. To be the church is a hallmark of our love to one another.

Finally looking at the prophet Amos, who is called by God to be more than just turning away from his old life and more than growth within one's own religious structure - what more is there? The more comes in service outside of ourselves and the church. The life of a Christian begins with looking at self then growing with others and finally the maturity to give from a place of selflessness and compassion. When I first came to St. John's I

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noticed right away the sentence in your bulletin after the final dismissal. It reads "Here's where the service begins".....and that is so right. We are fed here to go out into the world and be God's servants.

In closing, I'd like to think about where our Christian journey of faith is most seen and lived? I think mostly in the small things" of life, in the day-to-day world. As Fred Craddock has written in his commentary on Luke: Most of us this week will not christen a ship, write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with a queen, convert a nation, or be burned at the stake. More likely the week will present no more than a chance to give a cup of water, write a note, visit a nursing home, vote for a county commissioner, teach a Sunday school class, share a meal, tell a child a story, go to choir practice, and feed a neighbor's cat. But remember, Whoever is faithful in a little is faithful also in much."

Let your journey continue..

Amen

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