

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to June 8

Proper 5

Year C

RCL

1 Kings 17:8-16

Psalms 146

Galatians 1:11-24



The Collect

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Kings 17:8-16

The word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it

and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.” She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Psalm 146 Page 803, BCP

Lauda, anima mea

1 Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

2 Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth,
for there is no help in them.

3 When they breathe their last, they return to earth,
and in that day their thoughts perish.

4 Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help!
whose hope is in the LORD their God;

5 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps his promise for ever;

6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed,
and food to those who hunger.

7 The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

8 The LORD loves the righteous;
the LORD cares for the stranger;
he sustains the orphan and widow,
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

9 The LORD shall reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.
Hallelujah!

Galatians 1:11-24

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already

apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

SERMON

I once shared with you something Archbishop Timothy Dolan said.

Maybe the greatest threat to the Church is not heresy, not dissent, not secularism, not even moral relativism, but this sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality, that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms.

The greatest threat to the Church is a sanitized spirituality that makes no demands but only soothes and affirms? Now, why would the Archbishop say a thing like that? Surely the greatest threat to the Church is from those who would exclude God from public schools, or those who would impose Sharia law upon us or radical Muslims who would kill us all. Surely the greatest threat to the Church could not be a church that comforts, soothes and affirms us! What is so threatening

about a comforting church?

Actually, there's nothing I can think of wrong with a church that offers comfort. Churches and families should be oases of comfort, strength and support, places to which we can repair and renew ourselves. I don't think that's what the Archbishop is speaking about. I think the Archbishop is speaking about churches which offer comfort but require no commitment, churches that affirm but ask no conversion, churches that sooth us into believing that God's pure gift of faith comes with no requirement of reciprocity. I think he is speaking of churches that live behind a church wall. I think he is saying that the thing that poses the greatest threat to the church is the wall we professing Christians build between ourselves and God's inbreaking into our world.

It is a fearsome wall we have constructed. It is high as heaven and deep as hell. It is bounded about by mine

fields of righteousness derived from our own pride. Oh, we've decorated it with stained glass and a reverent attitude, but it remains a wall nevertheless and all the paint and gold leaf we apply to it will not change its essential character. It is a wall and a barrier.

Walls protect and walls exclude. What is this wall we have constructed protecting? The Archbishop says that it is protecting a sanitized, feel-good, spirituality, that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms. What is this wall excluding? I would suggest that it is excluding both the suffering of the world and the inbreaking of God into His creation. Inside the wall, we sooth and affirm one another. We ask no sacrifice. We mention no battle against sin. We comfort and assure one another, if not explicitly then tacitly, that we are the ones who have chosen to go

God's way and are thus beloved of Him. Outside the wall, God's children groan but we often do not hear. How can we hear? The world outside our walls deliberately conceals the suffering from us and our walls further insulate us, muffling those groans and offering us within the walls a soothing reassurance that all is well.

And yet, when we peek out the window and make ourselves aware of what is going on with the world we just cannot escape the conviction that something is dreadfully wrong. Things should not be the way they are. When I was a policeman forty years ago, I was paid at the rate of \$1.61/hr, the minimum wage. Somehow, I put food on the table. I wasn't thrifty. You could do that on a buck sixty then. If minimum wage had kept up with the economy, it would now be twenty bucks an hour. People working for minimum wage today have no hope of financial independence. Things should not be

this way.

Twelve hundred young women in Bangladesh died in a collapsed factory, and studies show that three-fifths of the factories in Bangladesh are not safe because the demand for cheap clothes does not allow enough profit to build otherwise. Young people, 119 of them, died in a poultry factory in China because the doors were locked and they couldn't get away from the flames. The doors were locked because the factory owners were concerned that their workers would sneak off or steal chickens. Things should not be this way!

I was in the Chapel of St. Arbuck's the other morning. A guy sat down at the table opposite me wearing a Glock in a shoulder rig. He set up his computer then involved himself in whatever was on the screen. I could tell immediately that he wasn't law enforcement — he was virtually unconscious of his surroundings, and he

sat with his back to the door. No cop would do that. Why would someone come into a coffee shop carrying a Glock? It's not unlawful, but why would someone do a thing like that? What he was doing was showing us that he could do it. That Glock was a statement that, "I feel powerless and this bit of drama makes me feel more empowered." He shouldn't feel that threatened. Things shouldn't be this way.

There was a tempest in a teakettle in Tennessee this March when some of the legislators noticed a new porcelain fixture in a corner of a remodeled Capitol restroom. Word had it that it was a Muslim foot-washing station to permit Muslims to wash their feet before prayers. Building managers finally convinced legislators that it was a mop bucket. Presumably they have now discussed measures that might be taken to prevent Muslims from surreptitiously washing their feet in the

mop bucket when no one is looking. Things should not be this way.

There's the problem. Inside our walls, we feel soothed and affirmed but we are irrelevant to the world and we are irrelevant to God's evolving creation. Outside our walls, things should not be the way they are but we can't add our hands to the work of changing things to be the way they should be because there's a wall in the way.

A few Sundays ago I reminded you that God never asks you to do things you can't do. He only asks that you do what you can do. What you can do may not be what you want to do, but it is what you are called to do. Doing what you are called to do even when it isn't what you want to do is acting from the gift of faith. Living out the gift of faith is as far from the Archbishop's description of an ineffective church as you can get and re-

main on this planet.

Consider the worthy widow of Zarephath. Elijah arrived in Zarephath, in the country of Sidon. Sidon was not Jewish territory and the woman was not a Jew. Elijah interrupted what she was doing and directed her to bring him some water. She immediately stopped doing what she preferred to do and hurried to do as he bid her. Think about that for a second. A stranger came up and demanded water. She immediately put her life on hold and hurried to do his bidding. We're not talking of some sort of obedient woman lesson here. We're speaking of a prophet, representing God's voice to His creation, being heard and obeyed by one with the gift of faith. This is what living out the gift of faith looks like. She had plans. They were not very good plans, but they were hers. A man she didn't know from Adam's off ox came along and she put her plans away to do as he had bidden

her because something within her informed her that she must do so. Do you think she could give us any sort of reason for doing so? I suspect not.

The story becomes even more harrowing.

As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

She and her son were starving to death. They were *in extremis*. They are not just hungry; they are facing death. This stranger insists that he be brought even her last meal and STILL she does as she is bidden. God doesn't ask of us that which we can't do. God asks of us that which we can do, even if we don't understand that we have the power to do it. God's transcendent will is

made manifest in His creation through the actions of those to whom He has given the gift of faith. Acting in faith becomes a transcendent act and an imitation of the God who came near.¹

The world outside our walls should not be this way, but if we merely sooth and affirm ourselves within our walls, we are complicit in it. All that is necessary, we are taught, for evil to prevail is for men of good will to do nothing. The key is being aware, and that demands that we look beyond our walls. When we come to a place where we see beyond our walls and see those who have been marginalized then we are called back into a relationship with others that is rooted in love and hospitality. It is at that point where we must either stay within the safety of the walls of the church with those who happen to be at the coffee and cookie table, or to

¹ Once again, as I struggled with these thoughts, I was surprised at the Chapel St. Arbutuck by an angel, this time in the person of Rev. Jacques Schoenthal Parlato who gave me this thought from Arthur Sutherland's book "I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality"

step beyond those walls.²

[Woodlands text here]

Here is exactly the place where the miracle of faith happens. The world beyond our walls conspires to keep those who suffer from our view. They are marginalized. They are beyond our ken. Out of sight, out of mind. But once we look beyond our walls and see them, things instantly change. We are called back into a relationship with those who suffer which is rooted in love and hospitality. The gift of faith compels a response from us, and so, we respond. We bring of our resources and give to Community Kitchen. We teach children through the Scout program and partner with the hospital for bicycle safety camp. We work at the Dressing Room. We drop the plans we had for ourselves and, following the call of faith, hurry to do as we are bidden. God's transcendent

² From a paper by Rev. Jacque Schoenthal Parlato of Madison Avenue Christian Church in Huntington. Used by permission.

will is made manifest in His creation through the actions of those to whom He has given the gift of faith. As much as we all love this building, this tradition, this form of worship, if we conceal ourselves behind church walls, we will make ourselves irrelevant to God and irrelevant to God's evolving Creation.

The word "apostle" means one who is sent, and in that sense of the word, we are all apostles for we are all sent into the world to do what we can do, trusting God to assure that it isn't something we can't do. We are apostles to the suffering of the world, church! It is our choice to act in faith, or protest that we are up against the wall.

AMEN

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AMEN]

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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