

## PREPARE ME TO BE A SANCTUARY

8/23/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 16 (Year A): ~~Exodus 1:8~~ Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” That’s what the Apostle Paul wrote to the people of the church. When I read that, a song called “Lord prepare me” started playing in my head. I sang it regularly with the children at the girls’ home where I served in Honduras. Even the rowdiest troublemaker would settle into a sacred space as they sang with great devotion:

Lord prepare me  
To be a sanctuary  
Pure and holy  
Tried and true  
And with thanksgiving  
I'll be a living  
Sanctuary for You

That’s exactly what Paul was getting at—let our very bodies become sanctuaries for God. We see the word “sacrifice” in our translation, but Paul’s meaning is more closely related to “consecrating”, as in consecrating something to make it holy. Paul says let your life become a holy space.

It’d be easy to slough this off saying, “yeah, well, the Apostle Paul doesn’t know all I have to contend with.” We’re in the middle of a pandemic, having to work online—if we’re lucky enough to still have work—making sure our kids are ready for online learning, checking in on aging family members without being able to visit them...it’s challenging!

So maybe it helps to remember that Paul wasn’t sitting around in a serene garden, writing this stuff. Paul was actually battling against the oppression and persecution of the Roman Empire, and finding creative ways to cheerlead congregations who were forced to meet in secret. Plus, he was in and out of prison for his outspoken ways. He, too, was dealing with quite a lot.

Which is why he then goes on to describe how to survive: “Do not be conformed to this world,” he says, “but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Yes, he’s saying they should do this “so that ~~you~~ [they] may discern what is the will of God,” but also so they can reinvigorate their hope. He’s essentially saying, “don’t let the public narrative that ‘the world’s gone to heck in a handbasket and there’s no way out’ take over your mind. Instead of taking on the world’s focus, take on God’s focus.”

Paul, then, goes on to explain this is why we need each other. We each have different gifts and none of these gifts are more, or less, important than others. As he describes the “one body with many members,” he’s comparing our physical bodies and how we need all our “members”, or limbs, fingers, and toes.

So, Paul writes, “not all the members have the same function...we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us,” and then presents some examples. Some have the gift of prophecy; others minister; there are those who are skilled teachers; while others are

cheerleaders; some demonstrate generosity; many are leaders, and still others are givers of compassion.

While we're apart during this pandemic, it's harder to keep in mind the many people in our parish who bring a wonderful array of gifts to the table. But we are still community, and you can rest assured, there are those among us teaching, ministering, being generous with their time, talent and treasure, others practicing compassion in our neighborhood, and others serving as cheerleaders. I bet if you think about it, you can see them in your mind's eye. We need all of them; we need all of you in order to be the full body of Christ.

The passage in Matthew points to Peter as the foundation of the church. Well, at least that's how it's traditionally been lifted up. In actuality, the "rock" Jesus says he'll build the church on is the knowledge and acknowledgment that people realize he has come from God to reconcile us back to God.

Just the same, Peter and Paul both end up being instrumental leaders in the formation of the early Christian Church. But it's important we realize neither of them were chosen because of their stellar qualifications. Before his conversion, Paul had been a persecutor of Christians. And, we all know what a bumbling fool Peter can come off as. Rather, Jesus chose them because of their commitment to the cause. They are fully in!

According to Richard Rohr, the author of a book some of us are reading called, The Universal Christ, Peter and Paul are what he calls true Christians. Rohr, who is a Franciscan priest, suggests that those who are truly Christian are able to see the face of Christ on everyone and everything they encounter in creation. I believe this is true of both Paul and Peter, and the reason Jesus called them into leadership roles.

What strikes me is that the idea of becoming a true Christian, has very little to do with competition and everything to do with collaboration. We don't compete to see whose gifts are better, rather we collaborate to make use of each gift, so that we all benefit.

I witnessed this the past few weeks as I informally celebrated the life of Matthew Landis. Some of you knew Matthew as a guest at the Food Pantry and Showers of Blessing. But he was never just a guest; he was one of those big-hearted people who insisted on also volunteering. I think I mentioned several months ago that one day he asked me if I could order one of those trash-grabbing mechanisms so that he could better help keep our campus tidy.

After Matthew died a few weeks ago—we think from complications of his struggle with diabetes and a cardiac condition—we've been in-touch with his sister and brother. As we share how grateful we are to have had Matthew's generous spirit as part of our community, they describe their gratitude for St. Andrew's being a place where Matthew experienced belonging. That is collaboration. That is church. That is seeing the face of Christ on other living beings.

Which brings us back to Jesus' message in Matthew. He says, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." We don't wait for someday when we can be with God in heaven, we create a sanctuary in ourselves right here, right now, where we can continually take on God's focus. And for that, we need God's grace. We don't prepare the sanctuary ourselves, rather we invite God to meet us in that effort.

Prepare us Lord, to be a sanctuary, Pure and holy, Tried and true.

-AMEN

**Collect of the Day**

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 1:8-2:10**

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and

called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

### **Psalm 124**

- 1 If the LORD had not been on our side, \*  
let Israel now say;
- 2 If the LORD had not been on our side, \*  
when enemies rose up against us;
- 3 Then would they have swallowed us up alive \*  
in their fierce anger toward us;
- 4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us \*  
and the torrent gone over us;
- 5 Then would the raging waters \*  
have gone right over us.
- 6 Blessed be the LORD! \*  
he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
- 7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; \*  
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the Name of the LORD, \*  
the maker of heaven and earth.

### **Romans 12:1-8**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**Matthew 16:13-20**

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.