

As I read and studied today's readings from the New Testament, and then read some commentaries, I kept thinking that Ascension was largely being described in the way Christians are supposed to live according to these texts. Now, it could be that my rose colored glasses are firmly in place in this early phase of our honeymoon period. It could equally be that I am getting an inkling of what this portion of the body of Christ lives and believes. Or maybe somewhere in between. I leave it to you to tell me whether I see accurately and what I might be failing to see.

In our letter from Paul, I see a great text in which to build a stewardship sermon. This isn't that sermon. What resonates with me from this letter along with my understanding of this parish, is the question of "a fair balance between your present abundance and their need." I see the joyful sharing out of our abundance on a daily basis to those in need. With our partners in the community, whether it be other congregations, local restaurants, or big box stores, I see the hungry being fed. I see other material needs taken care of as best we can through the HOPE center. And I see emotional wounds being addressed through the Pastoral Counseling Center.

The hospitality we offer through the provision of our space along with the labor and love of our volunteers has a significant impact on our surrounding community - a surprising impact, really, given our small size. The New International Version of the the Bible says this passage in 2nd Corinthians describes the Christian doctrine of giving: first, our desire to give is a gift from the Holy Spirit. You know, science backs this up. It appears that our DNA is hardwired for altruism. Secondly, Christian giving is not mandated, it is voluntary. It comes out of our sincerity and love for God and neighbor. Thirdly, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is universal, belonging only to one's ability to give regardless of income or status, and fourthly it is proportional to what God has already given us. Our rewards include the experience of joy, an increased ability to give in proportion to that which has already been given, increasing thankfulness to God, and finally that God and the Gospel are glorified.<sup>1</sup>

Using this explanation as a measuring stick, what I don't know yet is how well we live into these expectations of the Gospel. Is our sincerity and love for God and neighbor consciously cultivated or is it, after so many years, simply our manner of life? Is it what we do, is it what we are? With

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<sup>1</sup> NIV The Scofield Study Bible, Oxford University Press, NY, 2004 p. 1534.

our volunteers and our congregation aging, how will these ministries be sustained because they are so clearly needed by so many within our community. This is one question, out of many questions I hope to engage with you and the Vestry over the coming months.

I see Ascension reflecting Jesus' actions as described in Mark's Gospel as well. The hemorrhaging woman was an isolated, social outcast. She was poor and thus lacking in any type of power. Her illness made her unclean and thus would make unclean anyone she touches. Her community shunned her. She was invisible. With considerable risk, she reaches out to just touch the hem of Jesus' garment. And Jesus is not angry that he's been made unclean by her touch, he is not angry that she presumed that she could be healed, rather he sought her out and included her back into the community by calling her "daughter." He gave her her dignity back. He deliberately sought relationship with her. Jesus made time for both this woman and for Jairus. I realize that this parish really sees our neighbor, those who are poor and powerless and we seek to alleviate some of the suffering that poverty inflicts.

As I watch our clients come into this building these last two weeks, I see our volunteers interact with them and treat them as fellow human

beings. Although I hate to admit this, until I began engaging with some of our clients, I didn't see them, really see them. They were invisible to me. I appreciate that this parish will make me stretch and help me emulate Jesus better as I participate more in our outreach efforts.

I also hate to admit that when a newcomer comes to any parish, they can be invisible as well. Not on purpose, of course. We all want to greet our friends and catch up on the news. We so intent on interacting with those we know that we don't even notice those we don't. The challenge for any parish that wants to grow is to be sure and notice the newcomers, to greet them, to invite them to fellowship opportunities and to assist in the integration into the parish. No priest can do this alone and THIS priest can't yet, because I am not yet aware of who's been here forever and who stopped by just today. But I digress.

Our Gospel message today is conveying several things: the central characters in need of healing are female, which tells us that they lack status within their culture. Jesus notices even those who are beneath the prevailing culture's consciousness. The use of "twelve years" represents the traditional 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus, then, is there to bring renewal to Israel. The 12 year old girl is, in her time, of an age about to be married.

Her restoration to life means that she is able to produce new life. God in Christ has power over even death and can restore life to that which is dying. Although there are great crowds pressing about Jesus, Jesus makes time for those who make their needs known to him. The remarkable thing about both Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman is their faith and their understanding of who Jesus is, who Jesus represents. Jesus tells us “do not fear, only believe.” It takes faith to put fear in its place. Faith gives us the courage to tackle what seem like impossible tasks. Faith lets us provide the hospitality for which we are known. Faith lets us face the ups and downs that occurs in any given life. As Christians, we are called to live into that faith and to share that faith whenever the opportunity presents itself. Of course, we don’t have to do all the work. The Holy Spirit is right there with us, equipping us, helping us when we cannot do it alone.

As a congregation then, I see us like Jairus who although he has position, power, and authority understands that without faith he really has nothing. In this congregation, I see the tenacity of the hemorrhaging woman, determined to sustain itself as a community and to continue the ministries that make up the heart and soul of this place. And to the extent that we seem stuck between this life and the next, like the 12 year old girl, I

believe that our collective faith in Christ and our willingness to align our will with His, will make us a renewed, vibrant, vital community as reflected in our deepening faith and in our ability to share the Gospel with others.

Over the summer I hope to talk with most of you individually to learn about where you see faith taking us as a parish community as well as what fear or fears we need to face down. Where is the Holy Spirit leading us? How can we build upon the strengths of this community? What resources are available to us? Where our numbers are simply too small for the task, whatever that task might be, how can we partner in ministry with St. George's and anyone else who cares to join us, to continue to have an impact greater than our collective numbers? How do we best have fun together? You see, I have lots of questions. I am joyfully anticipating learning the answers. In discovering the answers, I expect my rose colored glasses will actually be clear lenses and that the Holy Spirit will make her way plain to all us.

Amen.