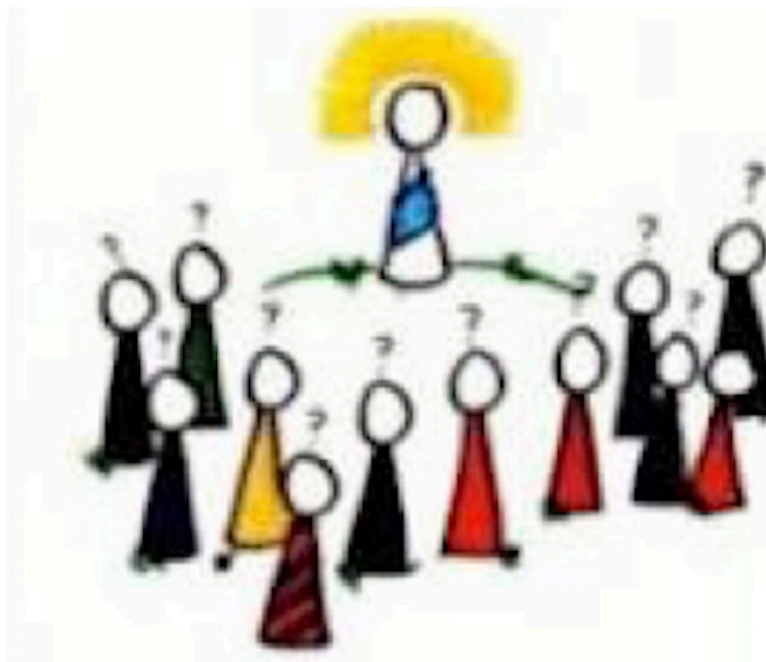


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092



PUTTING JESUS IN HIS PLACE

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached on the 6th Sunday after Pentecost

July 4, 2021

EZEKIEL 2:1-5 | PSALM 143

2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-10 | MARK 6:1-13

Happy Sunday! Happy Fourth of July!

We gather once again to celebrate who we are because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit says “listen!” We have a front row seat. Listen for what God is saying to us as Jesus’ returns to his hometown. He has been getting his ministry going, taking his show on the road, and now, when he returns, something unexpected, something pivotal unfolds.

This weekend, as a nation, most of us will reflect on who we have become because we live in this place and time. Families will gather. Or think to text each other. We will eat and look at fireworks and reflect. Happy Birthday Declaration of Independence. We are getting older. Who are we? Are we a true union, of republics, of states, of tribes, of families who would defend each other's liberty, proud to call each other neighbor?

Or are we just some loose confederation, serving a vast global capitalist machine, struggling to believe in democracy, fighting with each other over whether and how we are responsible for one another? No doubt, we are all these things, depending upon where, in this moment, we fit in to this project called America.

So let us return to that small little village in northern Israel, home to a carpenter's son, who, it turns out, doesn't seem to know his place. What's more important than knowing your place? You might remember, even as Jesus is just getting going in the surrounding villages, his family sought him out and try to persuade him to come to his senses. What would people think of all these healings and exorcisms? They are going to say you are crazy. It's like they knew - if you try to bring that message home, well, they won't know what to do with it.

And they were right.

And so now it is time for Jesus to be astonished. He spoke and demonstrated the reality of the kingdom of God, of the long delayed promise of the restoration of God's rule in people's hearts, of the possibility of returning to God regardless of who you have become. But his closest neighbors and friends could not hear him. They knew who he was. He was just a carpenter's son, of a father who is absent. He is that 'son of Mary', implying illegitimacy, who could not possibly be in possession of such wisdom and power. It was not his place.

So Jesus marveled at their unbelief. Not just in him. But in God's bigger plans for them. It is one thing to shake one's head and say: "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." It is another thing to do something about it, to turn the tables, to flip the script, of the insular nature of a nation's vision, of a community's struggle to see ourselves as part of the whole human family.

Jesus smiles. He says: fine! If they won't listen to me, then maybe they will listen to you! Jesus orders up the first missionary outreach, not as a template for all time, but as a parable for just that moment, when he needs his followers, he need us, to realize that we too will be empowered with all the authority of God's love and purpose.

These are the instructions. Keep it utterly simple. Depend upon the hospitality of others. Don't take anything, but perhaps a staff and sandals, because once you start, you will be at it for a while. Don't go to the marketplaces or the synagogues, but house to house. Person to person. Family to family. And just let them know that they can return to God. Take some oil. That ointment of healing and of the consecrations of priests and kings is what you will be about. Anoint them and point them back around to God. And then be on your way.

As the episode concludes: "So they went out and proclaimed that all should return to God. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

In fact, this is the plan all along. We are to be part of the solution. We are to be practitioners of the Master's teaching, we are to be messengers of the gospel, anoints of the sick, confronters of demons, wherever we find ourselves, here, today.

Speaking of keeping to our places and the power of the gospel to challenge and upset worldly expectations, I would note that, in this blessed land of ours, we have work to do today to break down myths about ourselves, to create true opportunity and equity for all. Economically, we live in the least democratic, most stratified era of our 250 year history. There is greater distance between those who have wealth and influence, education and mobility, than in any previous era. The numbers and influence of the middle class is diminishing. Education is no longer the great equalizer it once was. Our citizens are more and more born into the station they will maintain throughout life.

We wonder, how does this affect the American dream? Of course, there is not one political party, or one theory of the economy, that has all the answers. But there certainly are a lot of people like there were in Jesus' hometown who would rather complain, be envious, and make themselves part of the problem!

Let's take Jesus attitude as a compass today. As people of faith, we must not let any cynicism, any doubt, any sense of tiredness get in our way. There are those open ears and hearts, those new relationships, those lives we can change with the message that God has sent his Son, and that we are equal members of his family, of equal worth, and that we are all in this together.

Each one of us today has a calling to translate this good news to our waiting family at home, our great nation, our troubled yet hopeful world awaiting the gift of faith.

As the folks in Nazareth asked: "Who does Jesus he think he is?!" Thanks be to God, he is the one coming into the world, to bind our wounds, break down the barriers of status and mobility, and to rearrange us around him, so we can see each other in the light of God's goodness, that so uniquely shines through him, that so utterly remakes us.