

Rev. Duncan A. Burns
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Proper 21-Year A -2017

Last Sunday, I spoke about a Native American girl that was deeply in need of help. She was thrown into the role of big sister at an early age. She lived for several months alone with her three year old sister. When she walked to the mission in search of a meal, my heart melted. I knew that those children needed our help. When I visited her fifteen years later, she was doing great. She was the lead Sunday school teacher at the church and told me that there were children that needed her help. She had grown up to be a beautiful, humble Christian that joined the mission team. She served the mission because the children had a need and she had the gifts necessary to help them. Native Americans and Anglos have served together at the reservation for decades because our hearts yearned to help these children.

Paul writes from jail and tries to explain this Divine Love that melts our hearts in today's lesson. "Let each of you not look to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death —even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:4–11). Paul tells the people of Philippi not to be selfish, but to be humble and of one mind.

We are saved through grace in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and it is in that grace that we gather here today to worship God, sing praise to God, be thankful, and live our lives in humble obedience. Paul feels deep joy for those who have chosen God's path. At St. John's we say that our mission is to know Christ and make him known. When Christ was about to be crucified on the cross, he prayed for the church. Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). How do we encourage each other to be of one mind in a country that is clearly divided?

Last Sunday, I stopped home between the church picnic and our Celtic Service. I turned on the Giants football game because my top pick in fantasy football was Odell Beckham. Eli Manning made a beautiful pass to my wide receiver and I was pretty excited. Then my player squatted like a dog and pretended to urinate in the end zone. He was penalized 15 and the Giants ended up losing the game on a 61 yard field goal. Now Odell is paid 1.8 million by the Giants, but that is nothing compared to the \$75-\$100 million deal that he is hoping to sign this year or next year.

In addition, he has the potential to make 10 million a year or more in endorsements. The fact of the matter is that sports heroes can do whatever they want in our society. I know that not everyone can be a role model like Derrick Jeter, but between the scandal in college basketball, the National Anthem debate, and the behavior of some of our top paid athletes, I think it is time to re-prioritize our lives. How many of us get sidelined by mundane disagreements in our family, community, or organization that distract us from our true mission.

What if we listened to the Gospel today and got serious about not looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others? Would we still pay the \$2,500 for a seat behind home plate at Tuesday's Yankee game? Or perhaps, we could each donate \$20 to Episcopal Relief and Development instead. Maybe we should be more focused on getting fresh water and food to the thousands of people whose lives were devastated by the hurricanes and earthquakes.

This shift from arguing over the mundane to who needs our help and what gifts do we have to offer them is exactly the shift that Paul is writing about to the Philippians. I can promise you that the Philippians argued about things that were equally as mundane as Odell Beckham's touchdown celebration. Paul knew that they would never agree on everything, but that they could be joined together by one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So if you want to hear about Presidential tweets, who knelt or stood during the National Anthem, or how many years Weiner got for sexting, please see your favorite media. But if you want to follow the path of Jesus Christ as our Lord, you will need to change your focus away from the mundane and onto scripture.

Matthew tells us that there are two roads that we can take, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction... But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life" (Matthew 7:13-14).

In today's Gospel, we heard, "a man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go" (Matthew 21:28-30). Like the second son in the Gospel, many of us in the church want to do the right thing, but often we just get distracted. I can't tell you what your distractions are, but I will tell you that they don't result in joy, peace, or following God's path for your life. Distractions cause us to feel anger and hate towards one another.

This is why things like racial reconciliation are so important. Yes sometimes the path is difficult, but we need to see the difference between the mundane and the life-giving. The path of Jesus Christ is narrow and tough at times, but it leads to abundant life. Paul tells us that God is able to do abundantly more than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). Abundant life begins the moment we come to Christ and receive Him as our Lord and Savior. Abundant life begins as soon as you realize that God loves you so deeply that

Jesus came to live and die with all of us. But that is not where it ends. Jesus rose from the dead that we might know that abundant life goes on through all eternity.

We are on the edge of wonderful ministry at St. John's, if only you will not let yourselves be distracted. I pray that we will see our lives as blessings and that you will be a blessing to others. I pray that we will humbly serve others in obedience to God's will. Scripture tells us to be of the same mind as Jesus Christ. We live in a confusing and conflicted world, but we can walk the narrow road together. Do you want to know the secret of solving this country's largest problems? The secret lies in the love of God that lies deep in our heart. God is able to move us to right action through people like that little Navajo girl that melted our hearts or in the compassion you feel for those in Puerto Rico. Feel the fire of God's love that melts our hearts that we may have the same mind as Christ and show kindness and mercy to all your neighbors. **Amen.**