

The Sermon
Sunday, October 25, 2020
21st Sunday after Pentecost-Proper 25
Rev. Duncan A. Burns, Rector

In today's Old Testament lesson, Moses ends his journey on the top of a mountain. In the distance, Moses can see the land that God promised to the descendants of Abraham. At St. John's, we stand here in Huntington with that vision just before us. We are promised eternal life through our faith. Good things are happening here, and you just get a sense that great things are on the horizon if only we will continue this journey with God in faith. Jesus summed up our part of the journey with two commandments. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Being a Christian boils down to two simple commandments that are connected with one another. To love God is to love your neighbor and to love your neighbor is to love God. My first question for you today is, "Where do we find that kind of *agape* love." The simple answer is, "We find that *agape* love through God." The passing on of God's love through Jesus Christ is summed up in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." When we are transformed by the love of God our heart overflows with that love. This transformation occurs both through our will and through the will of God. When you love because you are loved, there is more energy and more patience. When you love because you are loved, you are thankful for everything you have. Hospitality and generosity just becomes second nature to us. Helping others can become refreshing and rejuvenating because the love, mercy, and grace of God flow through us.

We bring others to the love of God by allowing our hearts to overflow with that love. Bringing others to believe in the power and love of God is not about understanding theology. In fact, the details of our theology have caused us to fight with ourselves for centuries. We are not Christians because we think the right way. What really counts is the love in our hearts. Right thought without right actions to your neighbor is the problem that Jesus had with the Pharisees. Right action is better understood in our prayer for mission, "Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name" (BCP p. 101).

Our mission at St. John's is to know Christ and to make him known. Another way to express our mission is that we are to know the love of God and we are to share that love with our neighbors. To know God is to know the love of God in Jesus Christ. There are

many ways that we can come to know the love of God, but the most common method is transformation. "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This image is captured for me in the poem:

THE LAKE OF BEAUTY by Edward Carpenter

Let your mind be quiet, realizing the beauty of the world, and the immense, the boundless treasures that it holds in store.

All that you have within you, all that your heart desires, all that your Nature so specially fits you for - that or the counterpart of it waits embedded in the great Whole, for you.

It will surely come to you. Yet equally surely not one moment before its appointed time will it come. All your crying and fever and reaching out of hands will make no difference.

Therefore do not begin that game at all. Do not recklessly spin the waters of your mind in this direction and in that, lest you become like a spring lost and dissipated in the desert.

But draw them together into a little compass, and hold them still, so still;

And let them become clear, so clear - so limpid, so mirror-like;

At last the mountains and the sky shall glass themselves in peaceful beauty,

And the antelope shall descend to drink, and to gaze at his reflected image, and the lion to quench his thirst,

And Love himself shall come and bend over, and catch his own likeness in you.

This transformation into the image of God (or the love of God) is accomplished through our own will and through the will of God. My second question is this: How does that transformation take place through the will of God? We are transformed by the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. These are ontological changes that come from above. In Baptism, we are made members of the body of Christ and share in His ministry. We pass through sin and death into a life of grace.

The Eucharist signifies our unity with God, our self, and one another. It is a personal encounter with the living presence of Christ and strengthens us to do the ministry that we are called to do. My last question is: How does that transformation take place through our own will? When an angel came to Mary at the annunciation she was faced with a situation that she couldn't fully understand, but the love she had for God led her to say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:37-38). If you would like to feel the love, mercy, and grace flow through your heart to others, I recommend beginning everyday with the words, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"

We were created in the likeness of God, and we are being transformed by the love of God. When we offer ourselves to the Lord, we are transformed into that likeness. Hospitality and Generosity become second nature to us. Helping others can become refreshing and rejuvenating because the love, mercy, and grace of God flow through us. We bring others to the love of God by allowing our hearts to overflow with that love. Jesus tells us to be wise as serpents, but gentle as lambs when we go out. Jesus tells us that that we should love our neighbor. To truly love our neighbor we must first let our life flow towards a reflection of God's love. God will then move our hearts to love our neighbors. When we love God with all our heart, soul and mind we are drawn away from fear, selfishness, and greed and into the Kingdom of God. We begin to love our neighbor because our belly begins to burn with righteousness like the prophets of old. Hospitality and generosity begin to flow from the entire community. Ministry to others flows from our parish.

When we are motivated by God's grace and love to offer hospitality and love to our neighbor by giving of ourselves, we become an Easter people, resurrected by the love of God, in the path of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.