

2/3/2019 Sermon

I want to ask you an important question this morning. Can you notice God's presence in the trajectory your life is headed, at this time and in this moment? If you haven't stopped to think about this, I would like you to. You need to know the answer to this question in order to see the bigger picture of ministry as it relates to this congregation.

In 1991, I was ordained a Permanent Deacon for the Archdiocese of Chicago. As many of you know, a deacon has one foot in the church, but the primary focus of hers or his ministry is out in the world that they live. This has a very deliberate focus on family life, work life and community life. It is a ministry described as living in a fish bowl as it is not hidden but very visible to the world. After years of training, a Deacon chooses to love a very visible life of service to the church and serves at the pleasure of the Bishop.

I mention this, because the life of any individual Christian should resemble this type of life. Many will say that they do not have the education, or are too old, or health is not good enough, are too busy, are introverts, do not have transportation, or possibly a little afraid. Jeremiah obviously felt this way. Despite that he was already 18 yo, Jeremiah responds to God's call by saying, "Ah Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." How does God respond? "Do not say I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you."

God tells Jeremiah that the words to say will be provided and to not be afraid. I am **not** going to say that we make excuses at times, but when we do, God brushes all those away and tells us that we have a mission to accomplish. God will provide the means and the way to accomplish it.

In a very familiar reading, Paul tells us that Love will also provide a way. This resonates with the message of our Presiding Bishop who constantly preaches about the love of Jesus. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry told students at Trinity Preparatory School on Feb. 1st that love can change the world, and them. "God made us to be love and to love," he said during a special assembly at the school in Winter Park, Florida, north of Orlando. "If you think of love only as a sentiment, it is hard to see how it can have a great impact, but if you understand that sentiment leads to commitment, a commitment to seek the good, the

welfare, the well-being of the other” ahead of one’s own self-interest, then “it’s a commitment that actually looks something like God, who the Bible says is love.” “My brothers and sisters, that’s the power of love,” he said, to applause. “And that love had a power because the source of the love is actually God.” He continued, “Love has the power – I’m telling you it really does – have the power to lift you up when reality, life, will sometimes pull you down.” Every single one of us can choose to love. Not in the romantic way, although that is important to. But a choice to love others in every way that we can and to ask nothing in return.

Now, what can that look like in a congregation?

Hawai’i’s Big Island covers just more than 5,000 square miles and is home to some 200,000 people, many of them veterans and many of them living well below the poverty line, according to U.S. census data. The island is home to full- and part-time residents, and others living off the grid in substandard housing or even tents. I saw a lot of this first-hand when I was stationed in Hawaii back in the early 1980’s. You would see beautiful beach properties that most of us would die for. And on that property would be a small shack or possibly a small house. And yes, tents. No water or electricity in many of them. One episcopal congregation of the island of Hawaii, is St Judes.

In an article found on the Episcopal Church Network; it reads: “The lay leadership at St. Jude’s Episcopal Church here in Ocean View has turned the small church in the rural, underserved district of Ka’u on the Big Island into a beacon of light and hope; it lives up to its reputation as “the little church with the big heart.” Under the dedicated leadership of bishop’s warden Cordelia Burt and a small group of lay members serving on the bishop’s committee, St. Jude’s is more than a congregation. It’s a family, they say, attracting people from all walks of life, from the richest to the poorest, from those living on estates to those living in tents. It’s the off-the-grid folks and the hungry, homeless, technologically underserved, lost, lonely and forgotten who’ve inspired much of the congregation’s social outreach, including its shower ministry, named for a now-deceased transsexual member of the parish, Sheila, who suddenly stopped attending Sunday services. “She wasn’t coming to church for a while and we knew she was sick, and her partner said she’s not coming to church because she doesn’t have any way to take a shower,” said Burt. “We’d been looking into building showers and doing this, and so I found out that they [Sheila and her partner] had no way of getting water. Their landlord didn’t give them a hose. The landlord said if they didn’t buy

cigarettes, they'd have enough money for a hose. "Long story short, when we learned that Sheila wasn't coming to church because she couldn't take a shower, we went and bought a hose, and I took a bar of soap over and gave it to them. And for as long as Sheila could make it, she came to church every Sunday, and the sad part of the story is we didn't get the shower up and running until after Sheila died." "We decided that we would name the showers 'Sheila's Showers' because she would have loved to have had hot water," added Cutts.

Here's how it works. On Saturday mornings, volunteers arrive at 8 a.m. and put on the coffee and the soup. At 9 a.m., shower patrons beginning signing up to use one of the two showers. Sign-up ends at 12:30 p.m., and the volunteers stay until the last patron showers. Before St. Jude's installed a second shower, it might be 4 p.m. by the time the last patron showered. Now, with two showers, it's more like 12:30 or 1 p.m., the leaders said. "One of our first patrons that used the showers, when she came out of the shower, we have two people — male and female — sitting out there dispensing the shampoo, the conditioner, the body wash, fresh towels, we supply all of that, and she was crying and Beverly [the volunteer] thought, 'Oh my God, was the water too hot?' And she said, 'No, this is the first time in six months that I've had hot water on my head.'" Additional social services St. Jude's provides to the community include; hosting the county's senior nutrition program, food pantry, free veterinary services, free Wi-Fi and electronics charging stations, a computer lab, and space for 12-step addiction recovery programs and for community organizations. Their website states: Welcome to St. Jude's Episcopal Church in Hawaii. Where Jesus talk is a daily walk With sweet aloha, we invite you to worship with us. But you are also welcome to drop by to enjoy our free Wi-Fi, Saturday Showers, Hot Meal, Free Computer Lab or the dozen other activities happening at St. Jude's."

I reached out to Cordelia last week to say hello and ask more about their congregation.

"Aloha Fr. Dan,

Thank you for your note. Our congregations ASA is 48, sometimes it gets up to 50 depending on the time of year. We are an older membership with only one family that has children ranging in age from 14 to 10 and a baby of 4. We work with visiting priests that supply Sunday services to us for a month or up to 4 months. We stress that the whole congregation is the minister of the church and most are involved with the ministries we provide. No one ever goes hungry if they come to St. Jude's, all are invited in when there is food available which is Sat.

showers and Sunday Aloha hour. We find, the more outreach we do, the more God blesses us, and the more that is provided to reach out more, we just need younger members to take up the reins from the older ones and He is providing that also. All I can say is step back and teach the laity how important they are. We are the hands and feet of Jesus and hopefully when someone looks at us, they also see His face. Many Blessings to you and your congregation as you go forward". Cordelia Burt, Bishop's Warden

I realize that providing free showers is not something that we would be able to provide and may not even be a need. That is not my point. St Judes looked at needs in their community and found a way to help. I do not yet know what needs that we can fill here in Adrian and Tecumseh. Jan and I are working on this along with the Vestry. But I also know that many of you may already have ideas that we can discuss and look at. You have lived here for a long time. You know the areas that you touch and live in, the activities that you are already a part of. For example, Todd got me in touch with a member of Kiwanis who could sponsor me. I would not have known this person.

St John's in Clinton found out that the Fire department no longer had the funds to purchase blankets and quilts to give to children affected by home fires. They started a blanket ministry and now provide blankets and quilts to the fire department, something that the community needed.

I visited the area funeral homes this past week and offered to serve at funerals for those who do not attend a church and would like a clergy person for their service. That is something that I can do as a member of this congregation. My friends, every one of you has so much to offer. Do not be afraid for God is with you and will provide the strength and the words that you need to be Jesus to others. We are just at the beginning of this new journey. I firmly believe that God is guiding our way on this path.

AMEN!