

7/7/2019

God of love, usher us into your holy presence. Teach us the words to pray and the silences to keep. Refashion our days and hours so we may always live in constant gratitude for your amazing grace. Amen.

Last Sunday, I was fortunate to help celebrate the 175th anniversary of St Peter's in Hillsdale. I spoke about some of the early history of the parish as told in a document written of the years 1844 to 1944.

I suppose that it is not too surprising that many of the struggles experienced by St. Peters in those early years, are still seen today in many congregations; Disputes within the leadership, Clergy that come and go, difficulty with finding supply coverage, low attendance, and constant renovations.

I have also been reading documents discussing some of the history of this congregation. In many ways, the history here reflects a lot of those same struggles. 181 years ago, Christ Episcopal Church was established in conjunction with the Rev. Burger. Due to a failure to overcome many obstacles, Fr. Burger left within a year. The Rev William Lyster then got things going again. In 1842 First Presbyterian sold their building to the Episcopal Church. Many of you already know of the various church buildings that were used over the years. A very nice article was written in the Daily Telegram on March 2, 1974 about Christ Episcopal Church. Many of you were here when that article came out and have experienced, first-hand, the recent history of this congregation over the past 30 – 40 years. Each of you has a story to tell. Some encouraging and some not so much. I thought a lot about this over the past two weeks. Why do similar stories occur over and over again in the lives of so many congregations? Why do some congregations close their doors while others struggle on and

some even prosper? Jesus never promised us that following him would be easy. In fact, last Sunday's Gospel reading, told of Jesus's conversation with three individuals expressing a desire to follow him. He told them that just saying we want to follow him is not enough. We become distracted when we continually look back within our lives at other priorities. When that happens, our focus is taken off of Jesus. We say that we want to follow Jesus but under **our own terms**.

Today, Jesus sends out 70 disciples into the world, two by two. They had received basic instructions on what to do and what to say. "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road". In other words, don't get distracted. I know that something I tend to overlook about this story, is that they were sent out to prepare the way for Jesus. He sent them ahead to places that "he himself intended to go". Most of the instructions that Jesus gave to the 70 disciples, were not about the message they were to give while they were there, but more about what they were to do and how they were to act. Whatever the message was, Jesus would come along after to re-enforce it. Whatever was passed on to the communities by the 70, we know it was not **Fake news**. So why can we be so sure about that?

Regina Rini, wrote an article for the New York Times in October 15, 2018. She stated: "To understand how we might fix the problem of fake news, start with cocktail hour gossip. Imagine you're out for drinks when one of your friends shocks the table with a rumor about a local politician. The story is so scandalous you're not sure it could be right. But then, here's your good friend, vouching for it, putting their reputation on the line. Maybe you should believe it".

She continues; “This is an instance of what philosophers call testimony. It’s similar to the sort of testimony given in a courtroom, but it’s less formal and much more frequent.

Testimony happens any time you believe something because someone else vouched for the information. Most of our knowledge about the world is secondhand knowledge that comes to us through testimony. After all, we can’t each do all of our own scientific research, or make our own maps of distant cities.

To fight fake news, we need to take the same norms that keep us (relatively) honest over cocktails, and apply them to social media. The problem, however, is that social media is like going out for drinks with your 500 closest friends, every night. ... You might pick up a lot of information, but in all the din you’re unlikely to remember who told you what and who you should question if the information later turns out to be wrong. There’s simply too much information for our minds to keep track of. You read a headline — and sometimes that might be all you read — and you’ll be shocked, click the angry face button, and keep scrolling. There’s always another story, another outrage. React, scroll, repeat”.

—Regina Rini, “How to fix fake news,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 2018.

[nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com). Retrieved January 19, 2019.

I must say that I fall victim to this a lot. Readings stories on the Internet and not knowing the source or how reliable the information really is.

The 70 disciples knew Jesus and trusted him. Their source of information was the real thing. We know from today’s reading that they experienced great success on their journeys. Many folks believed that what they telling them was true and not fake news.

Paul approached this from a different perspective. Paul is very concerned by those who are spreading false information within the Galatian Christian community, confusing them, and

... “perverting the gospel of Christ” (1:7). These false messengers — whoever they were — were spreading fake news to the Galatians (cf. 3:1; 5:10) and a lot of them were buying into it.

So, in today’s text, Paul warns about deceiving ourselves, and says that we reap what we sow. If we are mentally lazy, and do not want to do the work of investigation ourselves, what we reap is likely to be unsupportable conclusions or buying into fake news, and social media rumors. We certainly have heard a lot about this from a political perspective lately, but it also applies to gossip and rumors at a more local level. How many times do we hear news about a friend, a colleague, or an acquaintance, and readily believe it because it appears to come from a trusted source? Or how often do we believe what we hear or see, because it is what we want to believe or see. It certainly may not be done out of spite or meanness, but maybe because it is how we see the world or our own belief systems. If we see immigration to be wrong for whatever reason, it will almost certainly color how we see immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The trouble with misinformation is that it often leads us to assume bad intentions or even bad deeds on the part of the person who is the target of the fake news, and thus use those conclusions to justify our attitudes and inaction on our part. These assumptions interfere with good deeds that Paul called for in the text, such as bearing one another’s burdens and fulfilling the “law of Christ,” which is to love one’s neighbor as one loves oneself.

Following Jesus means that we will seriously try to determine fact from fiction, and plain truth from gossip. After all, we follow a Lord who said, “I am ... the truth” (John 14:6).

When I read some of the history of this congregation, it is sometimes difficult to know facts from assumptions. Either way, as many of you know, rifts occurred; folks left, and most will

never come back. I find this to be true in many congregations. But this does not mean that we turn our backs on anyone. We press on and as Paul reminds us;

“So, let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith”.

We cannot control what others do or what others believe. We can only love others as Jesus loves us. We lead by example. Our lives need to reflect the love of Jesus for everyone. As we all know, Actions speak louder than words.

Back in 1984, President and Mrs. Carter began a long relationship with Habitat for Humanity. According to the Habitat website, “They quickly realized that our mission closely aligned with their values, and a partnership was formed. Just a few months later, in September of that same year, the Carters led a Habitat for Humanity work group to New York, serving 19 families in need of safe, affordable housing. That was the inaugural Carter Work Project, which is now a weeklong event taking place in a different location all over the world each year. ...

Throughout their involvement with the Carter Work Project, President and Mrs. Carter have become tireless advocates, active fundraisers and some of our best hands-on construction volunteers. Additionally, they have rallied thousands of volunteers and even celebrities, helping Habitat for Humanity to become internationally recognized for its work to build decent and affordable housing. Inspiring millions, President and Mrs. Carter have worked alongside 103,000 volunteers in 14 countries to build, renovate and repair 4,331 homes. They have also made quite an impression on thousands of Habitat homeowners and volunteers”.

—From the Habitat for Humanity website, habitat.org. Retrieved January 20, 2019.

The Carters demonstrated their values through their actions.

Edgar Guest, wrote in part for his poem “Sermons we see.”

“I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;

I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.

The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear,

Fine counsel is confusing, but example’s always clear;

And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,

For to see good put in action is what everybody needs. ...

—Edgar Guest, “Sermons we see.” For the full poem, visit: yourdailypoem.com. Retrieved January 20, 2019.

Jesus sends us out into the world to demonstrate to the world, through our lives, and yes by our words also, just how much they are loved for who they are, not for what they can be or should be. For love surely does change lives. Maybe not the way **we** think things should be, but the way that God has planned all along.

Those who love the way Jesus loves, are the best representatives that the world will ever see and what the world so desperately needs. We remain the hearts, hands, and feet of Jesus.

AMEN!