

8/4/2019

As we enter into this time of worship, let us focus on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. In that spirit, let us lift our voices in thanksgiving and praise. Amen!

I was born in 1953, and Yes, when I have to put in my year of birth on the computer, it takes me 15 min to scroll down until I find the year. As some of you did, I lived during the Cold War between the United States and Russia. The Cold War is described as “a period of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union with its satellite states, and the United States with its allies after World War II”. Most of what I know I learned from school. It ran from Jan 1947 to Jan 1991. Due in part to the fear of Communist activities in this country, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), was formed in 1938. It was a group that investigated the 'loyalty' of those suspected of having Communist ties. Not always with good results.

In 1946, the committee considered opening investigations into the Ku Klux Klan, but decided against doing so, prompting white supremacist committee member John E. Rankin (D-Miss.) to remark, "After all, the KKK is an old American institution."

In October 1947, more than 40 people with connections to the movie industry received subpoenas to appear before HUAC on suspicion of holding communist loyalties or being involved in subversive activities. Some testified and supplied names to the committee. Those that refused to testify could be sent to prison and many were blacklisted from the movie industry. Joseph McCarthy, a senator from Wisconsin, who is more well known for his attacks and accusations, often against innocent people, was not part of this committee. Under the guise of ridding the country of Communist infiltration, “McCarthy had free rein to say and do whatever he wished. With unbridled speech, he stoked the fears of an anxious nation with lies; destroyed the careers of countless Americans; and bullied into submissive silence anyone who dared criticize him”.

In all fairness, most of America was not aware of what was going on until the hearings between Senator McCarthy and the US Army were televised in 1954 and they could see what was going on for themselves, effectively ending McCarthy’s notorious hold on the nation.

On June 9, 1954, U.S. Army attorney Joseph Welch confronted Senator Joseph McCarthy before a live television audience. He said; “Until this moment,

Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. ... You have done enough. **Have you no sense of decency?"**

Many people's lives were ruined due to reckless, and unsubstantiated accusations that did not have to be proven to be true. The atmosphere of the country in the 1950's was one of fear, especially of Russia. I tried to find information about what the Episcopal Church was doing during the McCarthy era. I even looked over the reports from the General Conventions of 1952 and 1955 but did not see any resolutions concerning the activities of Senator McCarthy. Bishop Dun was the 4th Bishop of the Diocese of Washington from 1944 - 1962. He served as chairman of the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations of the Episcopal Church and was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. He repudiated the Senate investigations of alleged Communist activities led by Joseph McCarthy, and denounced segregation. I have no doubt that Episcopalians at the time were just as afraid of Communism as everybody else but did we as a church remain quiet about the tactics used against it?

Last week, the Washington National Cathedral issued a statement signed by the Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, bishop of the Diocese of Washington, the

Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of the cathedral, and the Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, the cathedral's canon theologian.

I believe that this letter is worth reading and can be found on the Episcopal Church website. Not everyone will agree with what is said; I know that. I am only going to address a small part of this as I tread lightly with addressing politics from the pulpit.

Some of the statement's firmest language focuses on racism and the erosion of common decency and moral values in the country today: It reads in part:

"We have come to accept a level of insult and abuse in political discourse that violates each person's sacred identity as a child of God. We have come to accept as normal, a steady stream of language and accusations coming from the highest office in the land that plays to racist elements in society."

The authors of this letter admit that the emphasis is really about the level of decency, or lack thereof, that the American people will tolerate. How long will we as a nation tolerate the dehumanizing of others in this country? What **should** our words and actions look like as Christians in today's world?

Admittedly, people's political and religious views often are in conflict today just as they did in the past.

The trouble begins when religious views and beliefs take a backseat.

Paul took this issue head on. He wasn't worried a lot about what others thought of him. The Christian community at Colossae, to which Paul wrote, was part of a cosmopolitan setting of diverse religious and cultural influences, including the Greeks, the Phrygians, and the Jews. He reminds the Colossians that because they "have been raised with Christ" through their baptism, their lives and behaviors needed to reflect that. Their lives **should** look and **needed** to look different than that of their surrounding society. Much like ourselves, it appears that the Colossians were having some issues with their old lifestyles. It is also likely that they were having problems adjusting to the belief systems that surrounded them including licentiousness or uncontrolled sexual behavior, the Gnostics, who believed that knowledge was superior to faith and was the special possession of the more enlightened. Ordinary Christians did not possess this secret and higher knowledge. The worship of angels and the occult also was present. These created divisions among the Christian community. Paul tackled this division in his letter.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.* These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.* 8But now you must

get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive* language from your mouth. 9Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator”.

Good advice for us today but certainly not always easy.

By doing our best, with God’s help, to put aside anger, malice, slander, and abusive language, we prepare the way for God to be truly first in our lives and that makes all of the difference. Paul mentions greed and Jesus speaks to this today. He is not saying that money is evil or that we can’t have it. He is saying that money cannot be our primary motivation in life and that it cannot come before God in our lives.

Haddon Robinson was a preacher and teacher of preachers all over the world. Someone once pointed out that one old recipe for cooking rabbit started out with this injunction: "First catch the rabbit." Says Robinson: "The writer knew how to put first things first. That's what we do when we establish priorities; we put the things that should be in first place in their proper order”.

Truly putting Christ first in our lives allows everything else to fall into proper place. It literally affects everything we do and say and how we treat others. It

allows us to speak out against policies and ideas that conflict with our Christian beliefs. It gives us the courage to defend those who cannot defend themselves. This, at times, can feel scary to us and we often feel inadequate.

Marianne Williamson in her book; 'A Return to Love' writes;

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you Not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.

As we let our own Light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others". (unquote)

I know that we talk a lot about our Baptismal promises. But it is always an important reminder of the path our Christian life needs to take.

The Commitment to Christian Service from the New Zealand Prayer Book has the following prayer: "Those who are baptized are called to worship and serve God. From the beginning, believers have continued in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.

Will you commit yourself to this life?

Candidate: I will, with God's help.

Through God's grace, I will forgive others as I am forgiven;

I will seek to love my neighbour as myself, and strive for peace and justice;

I will accept the cost of following Jesus Christ in my daily life and work;

with the whole Church I will proclaim by word and action the Good News of God in Christ."

It is not easy to be able to stand up publicly and to clearly state our beliefs without fear of being ridiculed or shunned by others. I know that for me it is very difficult. I am getting a little braver but still on the slow side. We know

that as Episcopalians, we have beliefs that are central to who we are but we also realize that we have opinions that may differ from one another. We worship the same God, we all come to the same table, and we serve each other as sisters and brothers by the power of the Holy Spirit. **It is so worth it.**

Amen!