

08/18/2019

Dear Patient God, you offer us choices, you help us as we struggle with the choices, and you love us through all of it. Thank you. Amen.

Last Sunday, we talked about the courage that is needed for change so we don't always hang on to the 'Status Quo'. Change can bring peace but as Jesus tells us this morning, change can bring hardship and division.

I believe that each of you understands, on a personal level, the message that Jesus gives us today. It is difficult to be an Episcopalian and 'not get it'. Some handle this message fairly well and others simply cannot, so they look elsewhere.

Jesus says; "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son and son against father,

mother against daughter and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

He was more direct in Matthew's parallel to today's reading, "I have not come to bring peace, **but a sword**". Meek and gentle Jesus? Gentle yes, when needed; meek, not so much. When it comes to our expressions of religion, we often experience divisions in our families. Sometimes this involves a basic belief in God, sometimes where faith in Jesus is concerned, and very often between denominations and belief systems. It can be very easy to misinterpret the signs.

There is a story about an elderly man and his wife, both focused on their issues. As the elderly man lay dying in his bed, death's agony was suddenly pushed aside as he smelled the aroma of his favorite homemade chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs. Gathering his remaining strength, he lifted himself from the bed. Leaning against the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom and, with intense concentration, supported himself down

the stairs, gripping the railing with both hands. In labored breath, he leaned against the door frame, gazing wide-eyed into the kitchen.

There on the kitchen table were literally hundreds of his favorite chocolate chip cookies! Was it heaven? Or was it one final act of heroic love from his devoted wife, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man? Mustering one great final effort, the man threw himself toward the table, landing on his knees in a rumped posture, one hand on the edge of the table. His aged and withered hand quiveringly made its way to a cookie near the edge of the table; feeling the warm, soft dough actually made the pain of his bones subside for a moment. His parched lips parted; the wondrous taste of the cookie was already in his mouth, seemingly bringing him back to life. What, then, was this sudden stinging that caused his hand to recoil? The man looked to see his wife, still holding the spatula she had just used to smack his hand. "Stay out of those!" she said. "They're for the funeral."

How often do we fail to see the forest for the trees? We can become so focused on the details of important issues, that we cannot see or understand the big picture.

This morning, Jesus initially is addressing his disciples but then turns to the crowds. He rebukes them because they were well aware of what was going on around them but could not see or accept the kingdom of God in their midst.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and his crucifixion. He was definitely feeling it.

He needed followers that were committed to his call and mission. He needed them to know that his mission was **not** a political one in that he was not there to liberate Israel from Rome. There is little doubt that the Jews would have rallied around that battle. That is what made his actual call so divisive. Pretty much the same thing for us today.

So many issues, that if not careful, we can also lose sight of what we are called to do, and that is to, love.

We have all experienced division as it relates to Jesus and his call. For many of us today, as Episcopalians, it may have started with the ordination of woman. For some, the acceptance of the Lesbians and Gay community, first within the church itself, then as married couples. Folks have left individual congregations or the Episcopal church itself; never to return. I

met with an Episcopalian who stopped by the church this past week to see if I would be willing to visit his mother at Provincial House. Pat said that they were former members of St Peter's in Tecumseh, He is not sure what happened or why St Peter's closed their doors. But the end result was that they never went anywhere else. I know there are several families who did the same thing. The issues that lead families and individuals to leave are numerous and not always easy to pinpoint. Though, I will never fault anyone who finds a church community where they feel loved and accepted for who they are.

Those of us who have never left the Episcopal Church, and those of us who have returned, are learning what it means to live as Christians in the church today. Families have divided. This is a fact. We struggle to survive. Then there are the broader issues we deal with.

These examples stir up deep feelings for me. None are cut and dried.

The Rev Becca Stevens just returned from a trip to the border wall in Texas and wrote:

"I know immigration and asylum is complicated and horrific. It's full of injustice and of people working their asses off to help people. I can't get that image of that tall, rusted fence that can't keep a vine from climbing, out of my head. I really loved the community I got to travel with and all the beautiful hosts. Women immigrants need \$\$ to make the journey across the US, boots on the ground folks need \$\$, social enterprise for women in Mexico need \$\$ and markets; so, so much more...we are working on a thistle farmer plan with our global team. Love, love, love". Thistle Farms, out of Nashville, is dedicated to helping women survivors recover and heal from trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. They provide a safe place to live, a meaningful job, and a lifelong sisterhood of support because, as their Mission statement says; "we believe love is the most powerful force in the world".

Immigration stirs up a lot of feelings for everyone today, including Episcopalians. Episcopal Migration Ministries "lives the call of welcome by supporting refugees, immigrants, and the communities that embrace them as they walk together in The Episcopal Church's movement to create loving, liberating, and life-giving relationships rooted in compassion".

EMM works to educate and inform the church-wide body through webinars that are available to learn more about how we can better minister to those seeking asylum and for

refugees. As our Presiding Bishop has stated: "Our faith calls us to love God and to love our neighbor, so we stand ready to help all those we can in any way we can." The issue of Immigration continues to divide our country.

Another dividing issue concerns gun control. No one has to be reminded of the recent mass shootings and the debate rages on. Episcopalians have **strong** feelings on both sides of this issue. On August 3rd, the same day as the shootings in Dayton and El Paso, Frankie Marks, age 30, was at a park on Detroit's west side with her 7 children. There were people all around picnicking and at family reunions. A guy that was angry over losing a pair of basketball shoes as a bet, went home and came back with a gun and two friends also with guns. They started firing randomly and Frankie was shot trying to shield her children. Amazingly, only one other person was wounded before the gunmen took off. Sadly, this killing got very little attention. Maybe, as an article in the Detroit News alluded, this was due to society being numb to just another shooting in Detroit. This may have a lot of truth to it.

Racism and discrimination, have not gone away. I have personally known families that have been torn apart from this issue.

The divisive element in Jesus' call reminds us that Jesus did not come so that we could have a happy family life -- though the peace of God which passes all understanding, can help. It reminds us that Jesus did not come so that we could get along with our siblings -- though the peace of God may help us live with the conflict or enable us to make the first move toward reconciliation. It reminds us that Jesus did not come so that we could get along with our coworkers and neighbors, though the peace of God may help us stay afloat during the discord.

Jesus did not come so that Christians could possibly agree on every major issue that we face daily. This has not happened in the past and is not realistic now. There are issues that I think we all **should** agree on, but that is just not likely to happen.

No matter how important or decisive the issue, we are called to love others as we ourselves are loved by God. That is who we are. To do that, we need to remain part of the conversation and to work together. It can be easy to walk away and to not face the turmoil

but it can also be very painful to leave those we love. I, for one, have not done well with that in the past. I know that God is not done with me yet and I am a work in progress as we all are. The road that we travel is filled with potholes and barriers. Those do have to be navigated with the help of the Holy Spirit. The road can be traveled much easier with each other. We were never meant to do this alone. Reach out, hold on, and keep moving toward the Kingdom. God of controversy and God of peace;

God of dissension and God of agreement;

God of disruption and God of unification;

God of Jesus and God of the church;

God of everything and God of everyone, we worship You! Amen!