

Pentecost 18 2019

God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that our hearts and minds may be opened.

Amen.

Some of us remember all the way back to 1979. I had already been in the Navy for 8 years and out of high school for the same amount of time.

To help you feel just a little older, do you remember these events from 1979?

- Black and Decker released the now-famous cordless mini-vacuum, The Dustbuster.

--The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (or ESPN) began broadcasting on September 7.

-- Nickelodeon TV cable network began.

--Victoria's Secret stores opened in 1979.

--The McDonald's Happy Meal first went on sale in 1979.

--And who could forget the introduction of the Sony Walkman.

In 4 days, on October 17th, we remember the 40th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded, not to McDonalds for the introduction of the Happy Meal, although that would have been a good choice, but to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She heard a call from God to help the poor, and she founded a group called the Missionaries of Charity. In India, Mother Teresa, and her helpers, built homes for orphans, nursing homes for lepers, and

hospices for the terminally ill. According to the Nobel website, she was a “saint in the gutter.”

In her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, she said, “I am sure this award is going to bring an understanding love between the rich and the poor. [That] is why Jesus came to earth, to proclaim the good news to the poor. And through this award and through all of us gathered here together, we are wanting to proclaim the good news to the poor, that God loves them, that we love them, that they are somebody to us, that they too have been created by the same loving hand of God, to love and to be loved. Our poor people are great people, are very lovable people, they don’t need our pity and sympathy, they need our understanding love.”

How often have we heard the call to love by our Presiding Bishop? Mother Teresa stressed that God loved the poor and that she loved them.

The group that Mother Teresa founded in 1950 is called the Missionaries of Charity, an organization that now has more than 5,000 members. They are focused on charity, but unfortunately, that term is often misunderstood. So often we think of charity as the act of giving help to people in need, typically in the form of money. But the word “charity” comes from the Latin *caritas*, which means “affection.” Charity is fundamentally Christian love and affection, not a monetary gift. It’s what we’re called to do as Christians.

Writer Anne Lamott explains her take on this:

“Jesus is so clear about who we think of as the least of his people. He says, “If you want to be with me, go find them, because that’s where I’ll be. I’m not going to be with the elitists and the deans. I’m going to be with the people. I’m going to be with the poor. I’m going to be

with the suffering. I'm going to be with the outcasts. I'm going to be with the marginalized. If you want to draw really close to me, go and help me take care of **them**, because that's where I'll be.

We don't do it by appearing more powerful and more learned. We do it by showing up and pushing back our sleeves. It's the loaves and the fish and **slowly, slowly, slowly trusting** that the more that we give away, the more will be shared and the more we'll starve for the softening of our hearts."

—Anne Lamott, interviewed by Susan Ketchin, "Anne Lamott: The habit of practice," Faith and Leadership website. faithandleadership.com. Retrieved April 2, 2019.

Mother Theresa showed up, pushed back her sleeves and got to work. There was no attitude of 'us vs. them'. She saw Jesus among the poor. Her work was a work of love.

In the Way of Love podcast titled; "Mutual Blessing Through Presence & Relationships", Bishop Curry was asked how people of faith can avoid having an "us versus them" attitude toward people who are not religious or toward the "secular culture." Here's what he had to say. "If you had to distill the essence of the Christian faith, there is no doubt in my mind that you would come back to the reality of love, not as a sentimental feeling, but love as a disciplined, spiritual way of living. A way of life...."

"Agápe is the kind of love that is service that's not self-centered, but that really is involved in doing whatever it takes to seek the good and the welfare and the well-being of others. When the New Testament, when Jesus specifically begins to talk about love, most of the time, he's talking about agápe, that selfless love..."

“So that the love that Jesus of Nazareth talks about is a giving love, a self-giving love, a selfless love, that paradoxically or miraculously, actually reveals the true self...”

He continues; ...” if your way of being Christian is basically the embodiment of that selfless Way of Love, there is no “us versus them”. There’s no them. It’s us. That moves beyond judgmentalism. That moves beyond the arrogance of my religion is better than yours. That goes beyond the kind of arrogance, my opinions and ideology and thoughts are more important than yours, I’m right and you’re wrong.”

The Way of Love is who we are as Episcopalians. The Way of Love is what Paul was trying to explain to Timothy. Remember Jesus Christ. Remember who he is and what his message is. Remember the Gospel, the Good News. In our reading from Luke, we hear a very familiar message. We hear a message of compassion, love, and gratitude. It is easy to focus on the message that we should be grateful for all of the blessings bestowed upon us and that we should always turn to God in thanksgiving. And this is certainly true. As Mother Theresa said so very well, Jesus is present among the poor and disenfranchised. He did the same with the 10 lepers. Lepers in the time of Jesus were very marginalized and ostracized from those in the community. The modern term for leprosy is Hansen’s’ disease. It is caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, the infectious bacterial agent of leprosy. Although the actual mode of transmission is unknown, it is thought to be primarily spread by coughing and sneezing via the respiratory tract. It is not surprising that people were shunned and given a wide berth by others.

According to the CDC, in 2015, India reported over 127,000 new cases, accounting for 60% of the global new leprosy cases; and Brazil, reported 26,395 new cases, representing 13% of the global new cases. It is rare in the U.S. but does occur.

Patients with leprosy experience disfigurement of the skin and bones, twisting of the limbs, and curling of the fingers to form the characteristic claw hand. Facial changes include thickening of the outer ear and collapsing of the nose.

Tumor-like growths called lepromas may form on the skin and in the respiratory tract, and the optic nerve may deteriorate. The bacteria damages the peripheral nerves of the body and as a result eventual loss of pain sensation. For instance, inattentive patients can pick up a cup of boiling water without flinching.

I was stationed in Hawaii from 1980-1984. Due to my involvement with the Cursillo movement there, I was fortunate to be invited to visit the island of Molokai. To this day, and mostly by choice, the leper colony, Kalaupapa, still exists. For over a century, from roughly 1863 – 1969, over 8,000 people were exiled there. By 2017, only 16 remained, ranging in age between 73 and 92. They have been free to leave but decided to remain on the island. In the late 1800's, Fr. Damien, a Catholic priest and Sister Marianna Cope served the people for 16 years. They both eventually died there. Kalaupapa is now a National Historic park but visitation is limited to only 100 visitors a day. I was able to visit the colony, see the small church served by Fr. Damien and see his gravesite. The colony was a stark example of a marginalized group of people by society. In 2003, a patient named Makia told the Associated press: "One of the worst things about having had this disease, is that even after

you're cured, society will not let you heal because of "L" word. People don't know how hurtful and wrong that term is."

Jesus did not shy away from the marginalized of society. And the marginalized sought him out. Mother Theresa sought them out and I have no doubt that she was sought out by them. Who are the marginalized in your lives? I know that I have to always work on this. As the Presiding Bishop said; there is no "us versus them". There's no them. It's us. That moves beyond judgmentalism". It is difficult for me to get beyond the judgement as to why the homeless guy is homeless; why is he or she always sitting on the same corner with their signs; How many times have they received handouts? Do they really have 6 children sitting at home? How often do I stop to give or to say hello simply because I am asked? How often do I judge? Way more often than I should. My attempts with helping at the Soup kitchen and with the Prayer Request table and boxes are a chance for me to actually interact with those in need on a personal basis. To do a little more than donating food or handing them a few dollars and driving off. Jesus could have told the 10 men with leprosy; "here is a few denarii, go buy some warmer clothes or food" and then walked away. He did so much more. Should all 10 have come back thanking and praising God? Of course. But did Jesus say that since 9 did not come back that he would no longer help anyone down the road. Of course not. It is highly unlikely, that any of us will ever be considered for the Nobel Prize. However, serving those in need is what we are called to do. Practicing the Way of Love is not easy. We are human with all of the frailties, mistakes, and our tendency towards sin, that goes along with being human. But God sees through all of that and loves us just the same. Thank God for that; literally.

Amen!