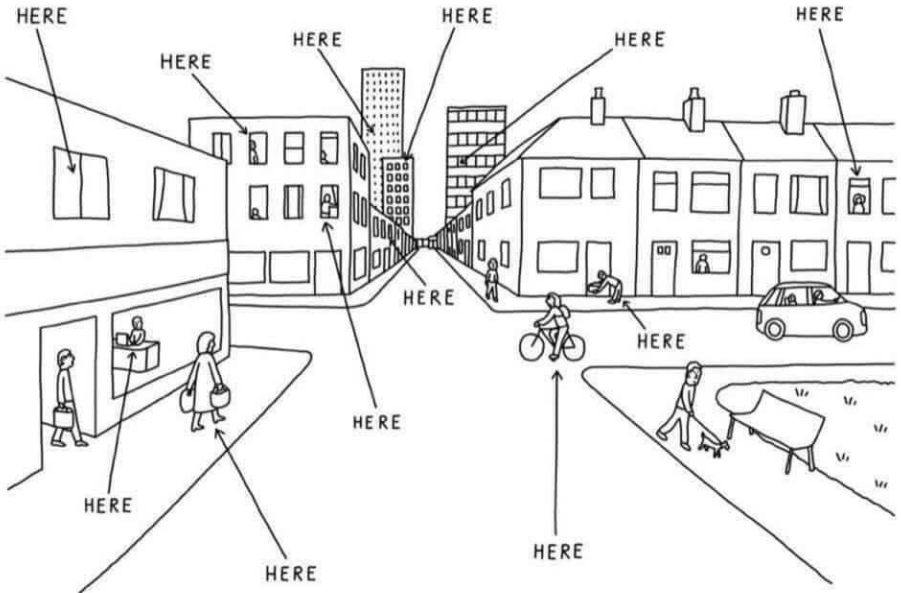


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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WHERE THE CHURCH IS



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HOW HOPE REMAINS

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached on the Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 14, 2020

EXODUS 19:2-8A | PSALM 100
ROMANS 5:1-8 | MATTHEW 9:35-10:8-23

There is a thing about “boasting” in our lessons today. It’s like the children’s song: “If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands.” If you know a little something about suffering, forgiveness, grace, and God’s peace – boast about it. If you know something that will help somebody else through a tough time, go ahead recommend it. Brag about it. Draw attention to it. Focus.

So church. We are not supposed to be quiet about what is going on around us. We must figure out how to boast about how God uses each one of us to answer with acts of love. If you know that you and others must be challenged and confronted because we've gotten comfortable, then boast about what makes for change and for peace. If you know a bit about being perpetually misunderstood, about suffering in justice, here is an interesting strategy. Boast about it.

This is exactly what Paul said. "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand: and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

We've been saved, family. And we should boast about it. But in a certain kind of way. A way that brings hope.

We have been given the greatest gift, life. Unending. Respect and love. Unending. Joy and enjoyment. Unending. Grace. Salvation. We have won the lottery. We should boast. Not for ourselves, but for the thought that we can share this gift with others.

We once had it all wrong, Christ died for us when we were still sinners, when we were still saying in the wilderness "we will do whatever you say Lord," when we were still thinking well of ourselves, when we were unwilling to fight for others, when we were still, to pick just one thing on our minds these days, racist and not anti-racist!

Finally, friend, oddly enough, and most of all, the apostle tells us to boast about our sufferings. It will teach us something.

So.... At the risk of being misunderstood, I shall "boast".

This is it. I have run 500 miles since September. I started one day and am still at it. That's the most important thing. I don't have any great aspirations. I have participated in one 5K race. Otherwise, I just lace up my shoes and hope to put one foot in front of the other.

It involves a little bit of suffering to be sure. I started running because I was tired of limping. I started running because I learned from people who run as a therapeutic, reparative, and meditative exercise. I started running because I needed to respond to a crisis in my body. I started running because something had to change.

And slowly but surely, it is working for me. I have less joint pain. I can twist and bend and move more like my 40 year old self. And mostly I have no excuse to exercise. I can run anywhere and at any time. And I think that is it teaching me other things as well. But that would be boasting.

But again, Paul says that boasting about the right things, initiates a process of necessary change and transformation.

Paul says: “And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

Wow. What a boast. Bring it on. Lord, make me who I am destined to become. A character. A somebody with something to give back in love. Let me boast just enough so that I acquire a heart full of God’s love.

So we can, if we embrace the process. We are given much the same a challenge in today’s Gospel: Pray to be sent out as a laborer in the harvest! Pray to be useful. Pray to be put to work. No pain no gain.

Jesus surveys the scene and says. Oh my, what a harvest. What sin and suffering! Get out there and brag about the Kingdom of Peace. Announce that God is at work, here, and share in that work by giving back the amazing miracles and healings that you have received. Give love and healing and deliverance away as freely as it has been given to you.

Next, Jesus carefully sets out the training program, the instructions for how to do it. Jesus program is straightforward. Be messengers of peace and grace. Nothing else. Don’t get weighed down in any other details. Speak the truth. Do God’s work. Extend yourself. Pray for a strategy. First go here. Then there. Note every sacred conversation. Learn from each one.

We certainly need that in these days, don't we? But it is more than just conversation and dialogue isn't it. It is actual gifts and experiences that God has given us that we are to give back. Gifts of healing. Witnessing to the demons that have been cast out from us, and standing with others as God sets them free. Demanding that lepers and others no long be outcasts, as we were. Extending a hand to raise the dead, just as was done for us.

We need the strength and courage that comes from claiming what God has done for us, and becoming witnesses to that power. We need to be trained to boast about what God has done, what is doing, what God will do.

God has liberated his people before. He has corrected his people before. He has brought his warring family together and showed them that, when they were still sinners, he died for them. He has taught us that that same love is the basis for our respect for every human being on this planet.

Running has taught me what is it like to keep going. To endure. To let small gains, small changes in distance and pace, build up to a larger improvement. A lasting change. So I guess I'll boast about 500 miles. I'll keep running to see how hope shows up - and takes root.

Running teaches me that I am going somewhere, even when I don't know it. It strengthens me to do all the other work that God calls me to do. It teaches me that my suffering is nothing compared to the gift I have been given to share in the suffering of others, to become something together, to discover hope out there in our neighborhood.

So be it. Lace up your shoes. Pray therefore, the Lord of the harvest, to send you.