

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

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PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

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Text of the Sermon preached on the Feast of Pentecost

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GENESIS 1:1-2:4A | PSALM 8

II CORINTHIANS 13:11-13 | MATTHEW 28:16-20

Beloved. What is sacred ground? In the beginning, it is the ground upon which we were born. The ground where family and livelihoods are nourished and protected. It is the ground we have bled for, and sometimes died for. It is the ground we ultimately call home. Ultimately, it is the ground where our bodies take their last breath, where we are laid to rest.

The very first verses of our sacred Scripture teach us that all the boundaries of creation are sacred, that all ground is sacred ground. And all created things, their bodies and their place in the order of things is sacred. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And then humanity in God's image. Therefore, the ground we are walking on today is holy. Every person we see, who touches this earth, carries this blessing in them.

In order to strengthen a sense of being a part of the same community, we often make a connection between this original gift of creation and our native land. We sing: "My country 'tis of thee." Yes. We pray. God be with us where we live.

The closer we look, however, the harder it is to say we comprehend the whole story. Ground is fought over. Space is contested. Holy ground is where we take a stand. Holy ground is also where we raise our cry of grief and protest. The sacred land of the pilgrim's pride is also the sacred land of the slave's rebellion.

This sacred land is so special because everyone has come to it as an immigrant. It is so sacred because more than many places, it holds out the promise of welcoming all equally, as of sacred worth.

This week, throughout the land, America has been lit up with the sights and sounds of protest. A cry has gone up. Something demands to be heard. Can we ascend to a higher place to see what is happening? Sacred ground is indeed often higher ground.

Maybe you saw it, the ground that used to be an empty street in the center of our nation's capital. Ground where today one reads in vibrant colors: "BLACK LIVES MATTER." These words, it has been reported, can be read from space! Higher ground indeed.

The descendants of slaves are still vying to be the pilgrims of tomorrow. And the descents of the pilgrims, young people and every immigrant tribe fighting for a place, is asking why certain lives have mattered so little until now.

Trinity Sunday is an excellent time to be reminded of what makes up our identity as Christians and what is sacred to us. To be a Christian is to confess the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

For us Christians, holy ground is that higher ground where Jesus gave his disciples his last and great commission. “Go into all the world and baptize.” By marking everyone with the sacred name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we know who we are.

And we never have to doubt where we are. We are on holy ground. As we baptize and teach what he commanded, he will be with us.

I greet you in the most Holy Name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every person we welcome in that name stands on holy ground with us. And God calls us to be one together in that name. To seek to live together in peace.

As the prophet Jeremiah once said, to seek the welfare of the city. The task before us as a church is as clear and as challenging seeing clearly that everyone on the streets today, protestor and policeman facing each other, is an American. That every voice is sacred and demands to be heard where it stands.

The original blessing of God’s creation is ours to enjoy every time we seek, as Paul urges us this morning, to “put things in order”. Paul was herding cats in Corinth. So much division. So much distrust. He ends his long correspondence with them with one powerful word that is a call to action. *Katartizesthe!* Which is rich with all these meanings: “Be perfected.” “Be made whole.” “Let things mend.” “Be restored to one another.” Or shall we say, reclaim the blessing.

Yet Paul also knew that this restoration and reconciliation came at a cost of honoring all who were making their voices heard, noting where ground is holy, honoring peaceful petition and responding to grievance. Thus he added these actions, these skills to his list. “Be open to correction! Listen up! Put your heads together! Chill out! Stand down!”

Let us meditate on his words again: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. “

It is customary on this day to be reminded of the great sacrifices so many generations of Christians have made to confess the name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the blood of the martyrs is the seedbed of the church. Tomorrow, we will be gathered as a Diocese to remember the names of all who have died by violence at the hands of the state or or at the hands of their neighbor in the street. We will remember them so that we can begin to “let things mend” and “put things in order.”

It will take everything we have to seek the healing of our divisions, both in our churches and in this land. It will take a sacred commitment to see each other as made in God’s image, standing on holy ground, seeking the same blessing promised by our Creator to all. To start the conversation – say, on racism or state violence – and stay in the conversation, and follow it where it leads.

But with that holy resolve, we can rejoice and rise to renew our confession of the one true God, the Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as is also our custom on this day, as we renew our Baptismal Vows. Especially, from the contested ground of our day, “to seek and serve God in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves and respecting the dignity of every human being.”

I think you will find in these words an action plan, a set of principles and disciplines, giving us the encouragement we need to continue to work and pray for putting our communities in order, for seeking God’s original and infinite blessing.