

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

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BIG PICTURE

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Text of a Sermon preached on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 19, 2020

ISAIAH 44:6-8 | PSALM 86: 11-17

ROMANS 8:12-25 | MATTHEW 13:24-30,36-43

My parents have been gone now almost 10 years. They were not perfect. But - to say the obvious - I would not be here or be even a little bit myself, if not for them. These days I find myself drawn to the objects that remind me of them, passing hours thanking God for them. It is a small shift in understanding. Before, I would, of course, think of them. About things that had happened. Things they had done or said. Now, that doesn't matter as much. Now, I go to them. They come to me. We meet somewhere in the heart and spirit.

Perhaps they have shown up in my prayers during this pandemic because of all the other things that have been taken away. In the midst of other uncertainties, I realize the Spirit is moving me to remember, to be still and know, that God is God, I am me, Christ is risen, and therefore I not only believe in the communion of the saints, I can experience it. Even when it doesn't feel like it, I can focus on who I am in Christ. I can remember he spoke in parables. His ongoing plan is to reveal secrets hidden since the foundation of the world.

For instance, this parable of the persistence of the weeds helps in some way with the problem of evil, of being separated from God's purposes. It doesn't exactly explain why bad things happen to good people, but it at least suggests a strategy to deal with it.

On even closer inspection, it turns out thought that Jesus is not just promising to deal bad people, but with good people who have weeds in their hearts. The promise is that as we turn toward God, the evil cause as well as the evil we experience will be destroyed. The secret here, the mystery, is how this will be accomplished. As we know from other Scripture, we will be saved, but as through fire.

St. Paul points in a more helpful direction as he describes finding in our hearts 'the spirit of adoption.' As we are led by the Spirit, we cry 'Abba, Father. Ama, Mother.' And in an instant, all we are going through is connected with the past and the future. We remember that our destiny lies with destiny of all creation. We are here because of an other. Others are here because of us. We have suffered. We suffer. We will suffer. We have been loved. We are loved. We will be loved.

Listen: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."



What is so beautiful about what Paul is trying to teach us, is that, not only are we not alone, but more importantly, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of every creature and all creation. God is not saving us out of the world. He is saving us with the world. And the world's destiny, it turns out, is not fear, it is freedom.

This business about not being debtors to the flesh but debtors to the Spirit is not about escaping our bodies, our physical existence. It is about resisting sin, the weaknesses of our human nature, and finding the right orientation, a home, for our bodies. Being saved with the world.

My favorite posts on Facebook these days are of people sharing their escapes into nature: we went camping; we walked beside a beautiful stream; we climbed a mountain; made it to the ocean shore.

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

Indeed. We are being saved not by escaping this world, but by being transformed as it is going through its changes. In other parts of the world, and within ourselves, the enemies of freedom are at work. Look at China and Hong Kong. Look at all the new ways money and technology controls how people think and vote. This is the enemy. The work of the Spirit is to get us to focus on how we can get perspective on that, how minds and hearts, get free.

That is why Jesus tells parables. He needs to light a fire in our imaginations. It is like finding the weeds suddenly growing in the field with the wheat and hearing the word of the kingdom. Wait. Patience. See what is going on. Find your place, reconnect with where you come from, go beside the stream, the running water, our destiny lies there.

A new and novel virus is here. It is forcing us to change. Other viruses have been here, like racism, tribalism, systemic hoarding of resources and opportunity in society. When we wake up to them, we don't need to panic, we should make a plan. Accept the change. See even that change is speeding up. But do not lose our vision as children of God.

There are places in the world now, like in China and Hong Kong, in certain governments and corporations, on the streets and in social media, where there is a desperate struggle for control, to suppress free speech and dissent. Each case will be different, but each case requires our discernment, our attention. There will be a struggle for power. There will be groaning and suffering and straining.

The purpose of God's creation is to be free, therefore our destiny is to be free. Paul says, we must not fall back into a spirit of fear.

God's word to us today is to go forward with the end in mind. Lean in, see if you can see around the corner. Look to what will be revealed. Look most of all for what brings the freedom and liberty of the children of God.

So we too will struggle, groan, strain, and make the extra effort to try to understand what is going on. Beyond party, ideology, material interest, and fear of the loss of reputation. Look for what sets you, your loved ones, and your neighbor free from fear.

Because God is God. You are you. And he made you for a purpose. You are a child of God whose sole destiny is to shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

Let anyone who has ears, listen!