

## Of Primates and Prophets

Perhaps you heard about the recent gathering in London by the world's Anglican primates – they are the presiding bishops from each country or region of the world that belongs to the Anglican communion.

Perhaps you heard that the Episcopal Church got sent to the corner, slapped on the knuckles with a ruler, and sent to bed without dinner because after a 40 year long conversation, we decided that it isn't our job to say to committed persons in same sex unions, or to gay, lesbian, transgendered or bi-sexual people, that you just don't measure up.

And I must say, when the news of our discipline leaked out, the question that popped into my head is this:

How on earth did Christianity evolve from a profoundly destabilizing, radical, turn the world's values on its head concern for the poor and needy and dispossessed – into an embarrassing preoccupation with the private sexual behavior of consenting adults?

Silly me, I've always thought that Jesus, the face of the living God, ought to be the source of what is important and what is not.

And when we take a walk with Jesus, what we find out in a hurry is that the private sexual lives of grown-ups doesn't seem to interest him very much at all.

He eats with prostitutes and shames those about to stone a woman caught in the very act of having her pants down in her neighbor's bedroom.

About the closest he comes to condemning anything (aside from self-righteousness and hypocrisy) is when he condemns the heartbreak of divorce, and yet nearly all the drum beaters condemning the LGBT community are either divorced themselves or live in communities where the sad fact of divorce is accepted as just another example of human failure – which in no way separates us from the love of God or inclusion in the full life of the church.

So it is no small irony that today's lessons say what they say.

It starts with Nehemiah and the prophet Ezra who have all the people lined up to hear the law – and they are all crying!

Why?

Because they know what the writer of the psalms knows:

"...there is no godly one left, the faithful have vanished." Ps 12:1

And: "everyone has proved faithless; all alike have turned bad, and there is no one who does good, no, not one." Ps. 14:2

No wonder the people are in tears.

These good, faithful, people know deep in their bones that, left to their own devices, they, like us, face certain doom.

But God's mercy says you are not alone; and God will do for you what you cannot do for yourselves.

"Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions ... to those for whom nothing is prepared, ..., and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Neh. 8:10.

And then there's Paul reminding the Corinthians that everyone has a place in the body of Christ, just like every body part, even the most despised, even the most embarrassing, is a necessary part of our own body.

When Paul announces that there is no longer Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, he is recognizing the astounding fact that before God, we are all of us simply human beings; that the divisions we create aren't from God, and that walls, rather than being built up, need to be torn down: including walls that forbid same sex committed couples from marrying, including walls that seek to keep out of this rich nation immigrants who are hungry.

All of which Jesus picks up on when he announces the purpose of his ministry.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me....!"

He's just back from 40 days in the desert.

40 days of being tempted to do things OUR way: like turning rocks into bread; grabbing for the brass ring of fame; pursuing power at all costs.

The Spirit that enables Jesus to say NO to all of that is the same Spirit that says to we who claim to follow Jesus: get ready for a ride; because my ways, says the Lord, are not your ways!

And immediately Jesus proves the point by announcing good news – not for the best and the brightest – but for the poor, including those without money or land, ....but also including the outcasts, the queer, the weird and the ones society calls misfits.

He offers sight to the blind: which includes not so much those who need a seeing eye dog, but those who are blinded by culture and tradition from seeing that the outcasts and the queer and the weird and the misfits are indeed our brothers and sisters, precious family members, the beloved children of God....

One of the honest points made by our Anglican Primates in London last week was when they acknowledged that the dust up over LGBT relationships has more to do with culture than with scripture.

The African bishops come from a culture that is deeply hostile to LGBT relationships, but so was our own culture just a generation ago.

And for all the beauty that our various human cultures bring, as Christians, every culture needs transforming in the light of the gospel's call to love, to forgive, to accept and to embrace – especially the stranger, the enemy, the oddball.

Truth be told, "this good news is only good if you are willing to admit what is hard in your life, what is lacking, what has been most difficult, because it's not "good news" in general that Jesus announces, it is good news for the poor.

It is not just release, but release to those who are captive, sight to those who are blind, freedom to those who are oppressed." David Lose.

Strange as it seems, it's good news for those, individually and collectively, who have looked in the mirror and see the need to change staring back at them: for those who have taken a deep breath and confronted the pain of childhood abuse or abandonment; to those who have looked deeply at the narrowness and exclusivity of our own particular cultures; and admit that I, we, are sinners too.

Coming to grips with who we are is what changes what seems to be bad news into very good news indeed.

Which is why this grand experiment here at St E's is so wonderful.

Historically, the Episcopal parishes in Hawaii, like churches all over the place, were segregated by race or ethnic background.

Even today, most of our parishes are primarily made up of a single ethnic group, where it's easy to replace the radical call of the gospel with the comfortable routine of a particular culture.

But not here.

Here, in our diversity, we can learn from each other, and challenge each other, and seek all together to live lives more deeply rooted in the culture of the gospel while still appreciating the goodness that each of our various cultures brings.

And maybe, just maybe, if we keep doing just that, we might find ourselves in the year of the Lord's favor.

Which is any year when kindness trumps revenge.

The year of the Lord's favor is any year human walls are replaced with bridges.

The year of the Lord's favor happens any year an enemy is forgiven, a grudge forgotten, when fear is consumed by hope.

We Anglicans live under a broad tent.

We pride ourselves on taking the best of the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, and because of that, I am hopeful that the current tears in our communion will be healed, restored and repaired.

Until that day comes, let us continue to walk with one another, understanding that when we fall, it is God who lifts us up — this faithful God who desires nothing more from us than that we love mercy, act kindly, and walk humbly with our God.

+amen

