

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 2, 2017/Year A
Genesis 22:1-:14; Psalm 13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God!

AMEN

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If you want to GET OUT, you need to GO IN! Some of you may recall this story from past sermons around this time of our lectionary cycle. It is one that does not lose any power of meaning and speaking to me at any time in my faith journey.

Marilyn and I were shopping to begin a week's vacation at the beach some years ago. We checked out and made our way to the exit when I saw THE SIGN. THE SIGN was not of the fancy four-color poster variety, just a simple, hand-scrawled in black magic marker version taped to the exit door. I suspect THE SIGN was posted by the harried store manager who, after verbally telling about a million people, wrote on THE SIGN the exact words he had said again and again and again. The automatic opener to the exit door was not operating, so THE SIGN on the door gave the following admonition – **If you want to GET OUT, you need to GO IN!**

It seems to me in our days and times of social, political, and religious dis-ease, proclaiming what is right and good all the while NEVER talking with the other but AT the other. Thus the spin cycle of "blame game" and interagency of views and action continues on and on and one. This way of living is getting us nowhere fast, so if we want change to happen in life around us, we need to be the change we desire THROUGH US in a living faith. The only way that truly happens is participating with our living and loving God.

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Paul's conversion certainly provides a picture of a man filled with the fire of God's love and Spirit to proclaim the truth he knows in Jesus Christ. Yet of the varied communities of faith he planted and led, with people from all races, nations, and languages, I believe Paul had to wonder what he agreed to at times!

The theme of **sin and grace** appear in letter after letter to community after community, The Letter to the Romans, believed to be one of his last letters written, reflects a more mature Paul in focus and instruction to this gathering of well- educated Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Even with their superior educated status, the community struggles for power and control over the other, thankfully something we never experience in the church today. The Jewish Christians claiming the “God’s Chosen” card, pushing for strict adherence to Levitical laws which meant, of course, circumcision of the Gentiles. The Gentile Christians, larger in number, push for that easier, softer faith that God really means allowing some of those other religious practices and secular ways of living to continue in their now converted lives.

Paul points out that what God’s redemptive grace is all about is expressed **through living in and as the community of faith**. God’s grace will not be found only in the buried codicils of Levitical law alone, or in the FREEDOM that Christ brings through his death and resurrection alone. God’s grace is shared by **seeking true freedom from sin**. That faith in Christ first and foremost is expressed **in and through the community of faith**.

While we still rankle and grumble when we hear the word **sin** in our day, it is good to remember the limits of our English language. Digging deeper into the root of the word, we find it is actually an example from archery. *Amartia*, the word used for **sin** in many New Testament passages, means simply *“to miss the mark or target.”* When we are turned round about, upside down, inside out by life circumstances, and **our actions in reactions** to those circumstances WITHOUT God’s presence, we **miss the mark** of what God desires for us to truly be and do in living this one, precious, faithful life!

Living the disciple’s life is to live a life in **discipline**. A life of **prayer ...** a life of **study ...** a life of **apostolic action** for the needs of our world. Sometimes we just **miss the mark** because **we forget to include God in our life actions**. Sometimes it just is not convenient to what we want to do, or how we want to live, or how we want to be seen by others. Sometimes we just **don’t feel like living this way because we think our ways are better**. We know the outcome often experienced by following these pathways.

The clarity of the Twelve Steps in a life of recovery states the need for **getting back on target** begins with you and me. The Fourth Step states **“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of OURSELVES!”** Missing the mark of God’s desire for faithful living RARELY has anything to do with what “others” are doing to us. It is most often our own doing, and we really do not like claiming this truth. But when we do, WHAT FREEDOM we can claim.

As I experienced meeting and hearing the five candidates for call as our next bishop to Delaware this week, I was struck by each of them speaking of **learning as a disciple yet leading as an apostle**. Simply put, the **disciple** takes into life the teaching of Jesus, but the **apostle** lives into its meaning as **“the messenger”** bearing this learning into the world THROUGH our faithful living. This means leaning into “others” who are not like us, do not necessarily think or agree with us, and meet them **where they are and as they are!**

As we celebrate our Independence Day over this weekend, I am mindful to remember our freedoms are based as **a democracy and not an oligarchy**. A democracy always calls us out of our self by going in with others where they are and as they are. A wisdom adage calls “**discipline without freedom is tyranny ... freedom without discipline is chaos.**” The power of God working in our lives is the power of God’s grace reflected by living an **apostilling life**.

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Part of matching up our inner and outer life is looking at both sides of life clearly and honestly. We must be able to face the joy and wonder of life as well as its pain, injustice, and absurdity. Truly compassionate, effective action means looking hard at both sides of life. That look will drive you back to a God-centered, always daring, contemplative place which in turn will drive you forward with a passion to do something about all of this pain with your gifts that truly meet the world’s greatest needs **when we live them!** If your spiritual practice does not lead you to some concrete action of caring or service, then you have every reason not to trust it.

This **apostilling truth** leads me to close with Marian Rainer Rilke’s beautiful poem from *The Book of Hours: Love Poems to God ...*

*God speaks to each of us as [God] makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the night.
These are the words we dimly hear:
You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.*

*Embody me.
Flare up like flame
and make big shadows I can move in.
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don’t let yourself lose me.
Give me your hand.*

AMEN