

Sermon 060720 The Great Commission

Peter Gomes, minister at Harvard's Memorial Church, tells a story about a little girl in Sunday school drawing with all her crayons and all her might. Her teacher asked her what she was drawing. "I am drawing a picture of God," the little girl responded. "But, my dear, nobody knows what God looks like," her teacher said. To which the little girl replied without interrupting her intense concentration on her work, "They will when I'm finished." REPEAT (*Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, p. 103,)
John Buchanan, Sermon, May 30, 1999.

And if one thinks about it, that's what religion and Jesus are all about. It's to help us draw a picture of God. What does God look like... what is he like... what is God's character.. how does God act? What is the nature or God and what is our relationship with God suppose to look like?

So it is ...that on this Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate God as Trinity... Father, Son and Spirit... when we hear Jesus Great Commission to the 11 disciples...."to go to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit and ;to teach them all I have told you... that we are reminded of our call...from Jesus to teach others about God... to teach others about Jesus and to teach others about the Spirit.

Yet herein lies the difficulty.... I raises questions and it forces us to think about our own answers:

- 1) What is your... what is my image of God... What is the nature of God and of Jesus that you and I are to share with others... what is the picture and what is the face of Christ and God that we wish to project to others... to show to others
- 2) How does our image of God and Jesus play out in our daily lives?
- 3) In what ways are we called to share AND PROJECT that image... that picture with others?

Like the young girl, most of us do have a picture of God. Some of us see God, primarily as the Good Shepherd... the loving Jesus who came to show us a better way of love.. And we see Jesus ... we see God as a god of love.

At the time Jesus was born, Israel was a land of violence and oppression. Government was authoritarian and oppressive and dominated.... An eye for an eye.. brutality was common place...for some of us we have a picture of God as angry god... a vengeful God... a violent and oppressive God who is ready to bring down the thunderbolts when we step out of line. This is the God who allows for

the Israelites to have their temple burned and be taken into exile... because they've not followed God... they've worshipped idols.

Or this is the God who destroys the earth in the flood.

Yet what we fail to understand is that these stories as they were told through the ages are stories/ parables which were written to show that God desires us to be loving and caring and good ...and that God wishes to destroy the EVIL not the world...God desires good in the world... the good he created the world to be...He created night/day/ light/darkness/vegetation/animals/ people... all of which were good and he created us... his people to be stewards of the earth and we remember God saw it was ALL good...God wants only to rid the world of evil... evil which sadly we see so well these days. And so we see God oppose the evil that overcame good... we also see Jesus as angry at times at the treatment of the people.. and how some of the leaders of the temple were in cahoots with the government officials and burden the poor with heavy taxes... he saw his people Politically ...economically oppressed and exploited and like the prophets in the OT , Jesus came to right the wrongs.. to bring justice to all people.

Thirdly.. we cannot help but have an image of Jesus ... and therefore God who is reflected in Jesus...as a person who enjoyed the

life he was given. He was not as the Irish say, “trying to put on the pious”.. he was down to earth.... So to speak... he laughed... he enjoyed.

. Some say it was revealing that in one of the opening stories of his life...the story of the Jesus changing water into wine at a party... a wedding.. It was there that Jesus’ mother sent him to take care of the problem of not enough wine... and even against his protest she.... Like the stereotype good mother had ever confidence he could do this... and like the dutiful son.. he goes to the steward and turns the water into wine....and it is notable to say... that it was not to show off his power but to save the father (who probably had been saving his whole life for this occasion) embarrassment.

We see many accounts of Jesus enjoying meals with others... and I will bet he smiled...he laughed...he enjoyed himself... he gave us a picture of how life should be lived with joy and love and laughter.

The scriptures also paint a picture of Jesus as a person who sought justice...one who not only showed us God’s love and to bring that love in the here and now... ... a person who loved and enjoyed love....but also a person, who like God, brought to earth and worked for justice.

Our scriptures today call us to remember Jesus life... and how he lived it and then as best we can... to emulate that life. Today's gospel reminds us not only of the ways that Jesus lived and how he reflected God in those ways... as he ascends to heaven....he gives us an assignment...a charge.... A directive

Go and make disciples and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you... and lo, I am with you always....

Or as one translation of the Bible puts so well....He says go out and train everyone you meet, far and near... in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit....Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I will be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up until the end. REPEAT

We are called...you and I.. to co-created with God. we are precious children of God and we are all called to care for this world and with its people in love and in joy. We are also charged with responsibility of making sure that all people rethink their being.. their status...their person hood. We are first and foremost a child of God. REPEAT.

WE are says, Rev. Dr. John Buchanan said, a little lower than God.. surrounded with glory and honor. We are children of God.. you are a child of God... I am a child of God. we each have been given dignity and dominion by our creator... and nothing... I repeat... nothing can take that away... not a miserable boss, a vindictive person,, not an abusive parent or spouse ..not an oppressive political system.. not racism, prejudice or rejection. (Ibid. 4).

You and I are made in the image and God a co-creator with God. that's the picture of God that we must paint for each one of us.... That's the picture of each one of us. That's the picture of the God who commissions us and the picture we must paint for others. As disciples we sign up for that and as a disciple we sign up to allow God's love to flow through us to others.

That should be our identify... a child of God.

A well-known pastor, remembers lecturing to a convention of Fortune 500 CEO's one time in Boston. "One did not really need to ask them what they did," he says, "for they had their names, their companies, their positions on name cards on their left breasts; President and CEO of this, Chairman and Managing Director of that, Chief of Operations of this . . .while it was clear they were more than their

jobs, they nevertheless took the major part of their identity from their work, and their work was defined by that little title on their left breast.” (*Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, p. 122), (Buchanan, *Ibid*, 6)

The pastor comments, “One of the recurring nightmares for people who define themselves in this way, by what they do, is what happens when they no longer do what defines them.” For these CEO’s, for example, the spectrum of retirement or of losing their jobs is worse than the fear of death.

Shortly before he died Professor Joseph Sittler gave an interview to a journal on health care on the topic of aging. Loss of identity is what happens to old people, Sittler said. “The first thing you say to someone after meeting is ‘What do you do?’ Well, when you don’t do anything any longer in American society, who are you? (Ibid., 5)

There is, thank goodness... an alternate word. It comes from the very heart of our faith tradition. It is that you are a child of God, you are created by God and God has given each one of us dominion and dignity and responsibility. You are a co-creator with God. No matter who you are, no matter the scope of your professional and personal world, you are a child of God... that is your identify Parker Palmer wrote: “The great spiritual gift . . . is to know for certain that who I am does not depend on what I do. Identity does not depend on titles. It does not

depend on degrees. It doesn't depend on functioning. It only depends on the single fact that I am a child of God, valued and treasured for what I am." (Buchanan, Ibid, 6)"

There is an old story of daddy camel and a little boy camel. One day, the little boy turns and asks his daddy, "Daddy, why do we have such long eyelashes?" The dad replies, "Well son, its to keep out the sand from our eyes when there is a sandstorm." The little camel thinks about it and then says, "Daddy, why do we have such big feet?" The dad replies "Well son, it's to stop us from sinking into the sand." The little camel thinks about this, and then says "Daddy, why do we have humps?" The dad replies "Well son, its because we can go for miles without finding any water so we keep a store in our humps." The little camel thinks about this, then eventually says, "But dad, why are we in the San Diego Zoo?"

And the good news.. this day.. each one of us is called to this vocation... a vocation of sharing and showing love to the world... So... go therefore... preach the gospel of love.