

Trinity Times

A newsletter for the members and friends of Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church in Athens since 1842
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Pentecost Season - September, 2020

White Privilege & Jesus

Reflection on Matthew 15:10-28
The Rev. Benjamin Lee Lentz

A man walks up to a doctor and asks for his help. The doctor takes a quick look at the man and realizes that his skin color is different, that the man's accent is not like his own. His response: "Sorry buddy but I don't have time for you. I'm a very busy man. Go away."

That wasn't a joke and I'm sure that if this story was set in the 40's or 50's and especially in the deep South, we'd have no problem seeing it as a very real possibility. Right? It would have been reluctantly dismissed as part of a cultural ethos.

I remember, while travelling to Florida with my parents in the late 50's, seeing signs on restroom doors "Whites Only" or "No Coloreds", even on the doors of the restaurants. I remember shopping in Paterson, NJ in the 60's and having retail clerks skip over a black person to wait on me first, a teenager! No signs on the doors, but the privilege was clearly understood.

Some people witnessing such an event at such a time and place might be appalled, but many would have understood these situations. Seriously, society said it was okay because that's the way America was.

In our day and age, I hope this story is repugnant to us as Americans.

But wait a minute. Isn't this a modern day version of the Gospel passage?

Jesus is travelling in a foreign territory - Tyre and Sidon to be specific - roughly the area of Lebanon. An alien woman - well, not really alien because Jesus is technically in her home territory - a woman comes to Jesus and asks for his help. She might not have been so bold if it was something trivial, like food or water, or even help for herself, but when it comes to one's child's life, conventionality goes out the window.

She is bold. He ignores her. But her child is involved so she persists - annoyingly so. The situation isn't going to go away quietly.

Jesus responds to her: "Look lady, you're not really part of my agenda. I'm here preaching to Jews who have lost their way and moved into this foreign land."

What's going on? Is Jesus saying that the societal norm of racism is okay? Is this the human aspect of Jesus? Is this representative of the "fallen nature" of Adam?

Jesus was indeed a part of a society which said that certain people were unclean: lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Canaanites (by the way, Canaanite was a code word for basically any non-Jew living in the area). Association with these people could pollute the Jew, making them ritualistically impure.

What's going on? I know we can try to dance around this and say that Jesus was just testing her faith, but that's not what the story really says. "Lady, you're not welcome at this counter in this restaurant. I'm the messiah for the Jews. I'm not your messiah."

Perhaps there's another perspective. I choose to see this as yet another temptation of Jesus.

God forces Jesus' hand through the insistence of the woman. Jesus must make a decision (like in the wilderness temptations after his baptism by John). Will he be part of the status quo looking to the outer person (a Canaanite) or will he be like God, looking to the person's heart?

Just as in the wilderness when tempted by the devil - tempted by social norms - Jesus takes the divine path. Jesus breaks the accepted religious/social norm. It isn't okay to shun selected groups.

Perhaps this story does indeed lift up Jesus' human side - not a fallen nature, but an illustration of what humanity can be. Jesus gives humanity - Jesus gives

us - Jesus gives you and me - the authority to allow the divine to rule our life and surpass the norms of society.

There is no denying that we live in a political climate that has used dehumanization as a tactic — refugees are “animals,” Mexican migrants are “rapists,” Muslims are threats, Blacks are rioters and opportunists, birtherism. It is used as a political tool. And there is no denying that hateful political rhetoric gives permission for prejudice and the accompanying ‘white privilege’.

David Livingstone Smith, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine says: “It [dehumanization] acts as a psychological lubricant dissolving our inhibitions and inflaming destructive passions. As such, it empowers us to perform acts that would, under normal circumstances, be unthinkable.”

Words are powerful.

In college I had a friend who had been the troop sharpshooter - the sniper - in Vietnam. He always referred to Asians as “gooks”, a term I repeatedly told him I found offensive.

“Bob,” I said, “they are people, not gooks.” His response was that he had to see them as gooks because if he saw them as people he couldn’t live with himself or his actions.

If great words can heal and inspire, base words can corrupt. Politicians, under the influence and seduction in the guise of conservatism, have been delivering the poison of prejudice in small but increasing doses. In Charlottesville, the scales tipped, the effect became fully evident. Foolishly, it was declared there were some very fine people on both sides!

White supremacy - also known as white nationalism, a fake term to disguise their true agenda - is heinous, despicable and has no place in the life of a Christian.

“...it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.” [Mt. 15:10, 18]

Jesus’ final action in the Gospel story declares an inclusiveness that sets aside societal norms. If we are to be faithful to our baptismal covenant, we must proclaim a gospel of inclusivity. We must stress, as Jesus did after his baptism, God’s love for all of his children.

We cannot pigeon-hole people for the sake of expediency or laziness. All are children of God, made in God’s image, and we must look beyond their situation or condition and look to their heart.

We must be faithful to this Gospel message in our daily life. We must examine our life carefully, checking our thoughts and words for prejudice and biases. And yes, we must acknowledge the reality of white privilege.

We must go beyond the accepted norm: don’t tell or listen to ethnic jokes; be careful not to prejudge people on appearances; don’t categorize or group people together based on their race or religion.

Choose the divine path.

Transfigured Into Beloved Community: A Message From Bishop Kevin

Posted on August 6, 2020

Hurricane Isaias was roaring its way through the diocese. Here in the Lehigh Valley, a storm was raging. The dogs demanded breakfast in bed, or under the bed in Annie’s case.

And I know that feeling of terror. You may know it as well. When your only instinct is to take cover, to retreat or shelter in place. That inconsolable feeling of terror.

Life at its harshest is like that. Some of you may even be going through it during this COVID moment.

And I come to you today on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Tradition names Mount Tabor as the site of this momentous revelation. On that mount, the disciples received a momentous glimpse of Jesus’ divinity — a much needed, hopeful glimpse of God’s presence in advance of the events to come — namely Jesus own suffering and death.

The disciples’ hearts were awakened and they wanted to capture the moment — to build tents. But there was no staying put or capturing this moment. Jesus’ own imminent suffering demanded they return to the harsh realities of the valley below.

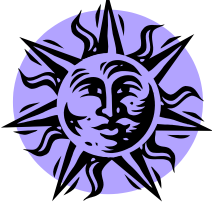

This day gives us the opportunity to pause and to name those Transfiguration moments in our own life. For me, it is this unlikely current moment — in the moral outrage that followed the horrific murder of George Floyd. This is my Transfiguration moment

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Trinity Episcopal Church - September 2020

**Pentecost
Season**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><i>Trinity Cycle of Prayer:</i> 9/6 Steve and Jill Komanik. 9/13 Nelson and Sue Kopatz. 9/20 Jackie Luther, Patricia Martin. 9/27 Steve and Heather Martin Lake.</p>				<p><i>Diocese of Bethlehem:</i> 9/6 St. Mark's, New Milford, The Rev. Robin Biffle. 9/13 St. John's, Palmerton, Canon Lexa Shallcross; the Constitution and Canons Committee. 9/20 St. Joseph's, Pen Argyl and St. Mary's, Wind Gap, The Rev. Jane Gaeta. 9/27 Trinity, Pottsville, The Rev. Timothy Albright; The Diocesan Convention.</p>		<p><i>Kajo Keji:</i> 9/6 Emmanuel Parish Lubule. 9/13 St. Paul Bori Parish. 9/20 St. Mark Merguga Parish. 9/27 Lorudung Parish and Liwolo-Helen Wagner Primary School.</p>
<p>United Thank Offering Ingathering September 27</p> 		<p>1 Convocation I Pre-Convention Hearing 6:30 p.m. (Zoom) Register at diobeth.org</p>	<p>2 AA Intergroup 5 pm AA 7:30 pm</p>	<p>3 AA 5:15 pm AA 8:00 pm</p> <p><i>Alan Caum</i></p>	4	5
<p>6 Pentecost 14 P-18 10:00 Holy Eucharist II (Spiritual Communion)</p>	<p>7 Labor Day AA 8:00 pm</p>	8	<p>9 AA 7:30 pm 6:30 Make up Pre-Convention Hearing</p> <p><i>Barbara Strange</i></p>	<p>10 AA 5:15 pm AA 8:00 pm</p>	11	12
<p>13 Pentecost 15 P-19 10:00 Holy Eucharist II (Spiritual Communion)</p>	<p>14 Holy Cross Day AA 8:00 pm</p>	<p>15</p> <p><i>Jon Murray Paige Bubniak</i></p>	<p>16 AA 7:30 pm</p>	<p>17 AA 5:15 pm AA 8:00 pm</p> <p><i>Kim Cornell Tom Maneval</i></p>	18	19
<p>20 Pentecost 16 P-20 10:00 Holy Eucharist II (Spiritual Communion)</p>	<p>21 St. Matthew AA 8:00 pm</p> <p><i>McKenzie Elliott Caden Hollywood</i></p>	<p>22</p> <p><i>Holly Flood</i></p>	<p>23 AA 7:30 pm</p>	<p>24 AA 5:15 pm AA 8:00 pm</p>	25	<p>26</p> <p><i>Patricia Gurney</i></p>
<p>27 Pentecost 17 P-21 10:00 Holy Eucharist II (Spiritual Communion) UTO Ingathering</p>	<p>28 AA 8:00 pm</p> <p><i>Shelly Strange Fish</i></p>	<p>29 St. Michael and All Angels</p>	<p>30 AA 7:30 pm</p>	<p><i>Anglican Communion:</i> 9/6 The Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Archbishop Thabok Makgoba. 9/13 The Anglican Church of South America, Bishop Gregory James Venables. 9/20 The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Archbishop Justin Badi Arama. 9/27 The Province of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, Archbishop Ezekiel Kumir Kondo.</p>		

September at Trinity

Sundays at 10 a.m. - Holy Eucharist II and Sermon with Spiritual Communion

Vestry meets September 20 following worship.

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that I am holding onto. It is this collective justice-seeking soul moment, birthed out of suffering, that I hold onto.

And there have been glimpses – when NASCAR bans confederate flags, and words like “white supremacy” and “white privilege” are spoken at the dinner table, when the courageous witness of long-suffering servants like John Lewis finally receive their due – it feels like a Transfiguration moment.

This moment is so astounding that one even dares to imagine the dismantling of systemic racism and criminal justice reform. And yet, what makes it a transfiguration moment, I believe, is that action followed our hearts being awakened.

Let me offer one point about the text. We hear from the gospel of Luke, “the appearance of Jesus face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.” But let me be clear. It was only his clothing that was dazzling white. Historically speaking, his face may have begun to glow, but it remained brown. Brown. There wasn't a white person, a single person who looked like me, on Mt. Tabor that day. And they were God's beloved.

As we seek prayerful respite with Jesus, let us be comforted like the disciples on Mount Tabor and

emboldened by Jesus' charge to get back down the mountain and bring God's justice and love to the suffering of the beloved community that waits and needs us most.

Who needs us in the midst of this pandemic storm? Who needs our love? Who needs our compassion most desperately?

Beloved, mark the first week in September on your calendars. We will be gathering once again in our new Convocations to discuss resolutions in advance of October's virtual – yes, of course, virtual – Diocesan Convention.

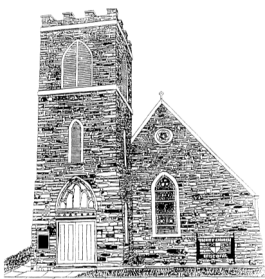
These pre-Convention gatherings will be yet another opportunity for us to reconnect, to grow more deeply in relationship, and to discover our shared priorities as we build something we cannot see or know. I look forward to this important time together.

Know of my gratitude. Know of my love. Stay strong. And remember that the only way forward is together.



Do you have a UTO Box? Our In-gathering will be **September 27th**. Virtual Diocesan Convention is October 3, via Zoom. Our delegate is Laura Cama. Pre-convention Zoom meetings begin Monday, September 1 at 6:30. You can register for this, or the make-up date, 9/9, at diobeth.org. These are open meetings.

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Season of Pentecost
September 2020

To seek and serve Christ in all people