

Boys Will Be Decent Human Beings

Revelation 21: 1-7

September 30, 2018 (Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost)

Rev. John Allen

This has been a difficult week. I think it is important that we begin simply by acknowledging that.

It has been a week where we are confronted repeatedly with horrifying detailed accounts of sexual assault.

If you are a survivor of sexual violence, then this week you likely feel your own wounds feel cut fresh, and you may feel overwhelmed by the constant intrusion of traumatic memory.

This has been a difficult week.

Let's take a deep breath together.

And another.

I want to make one more thing very clear. To any of you. Or to anyone who these words reach.

If you come to me, or if you come to Katherine, with a story of abuse or assault.

We will believe you.

We will listen to you.

We will keep your confidence.

We will hold your pain gently.

And we will work with you, and with the presence and healing power of our God, to find the next steps forward into a hopeful future.

No one should ever hurt you. No one should ever make you feel unsafe.

God does not want you to suffer or endure. God wants you to be free.

Let's take another deep breath together. And another.

Prayer...

As some of you know, I spent this past week in Kansas. I was visiting the Church of the Resurrection, the largest United Methodist Church in the United States. The church meets in a sanctuary the size of a basketball arena. With a stained glass window the size of a basketball court.

They have 10,000 members.

They have 30,000 people attend their service on Christmas Eve.

They were founded 23 years ago, holding their first service with 80 people in a funeral home.

They offer this conference each year as an opportunity for church leaders to learn from their successful growth and the amazing ministry they do in Kansas City.

I need to thank the Pension Board of the United Church of Christ, who funded my attendance as a part of my participation in the United Church of Christ Next Generation Leaders Institute, a 10 year advanced training program for clergy which I have been a part of for 3 years.

And I want to thank this church for supporting me in taking time away to learn, to be challenged, and to grow.

The most important thing I saw at Church of the Resurrection was that they had a very clear sense of purpose. Since those early days in the funeral home their purpose has been the same.

“To build a Christian community, where non-religious, and nominally religious people, are becoming committed followers of Christ.”

It is in huge letters on the wall almost everywhere you turn.

And every single member of the church could recite it for you as easily as I just did.

Having this well defined, clear, core purpose, has allowed this church to remain laser focused on the particular work that God has called them to in Kansas City.

I was struck by that focus and that clarity.

And I was amazed to see what it allowed them to do.

And so it left me wondering. What is our purpose? Could we say something so clear? So succinct?

Could we all agree on something? A few words that define who we are and what we are doing?

That is about all I have prayed about in the past few days.

“God, what is your purpose, your hope for this church?”

Now, this is a congregational church, and of course the answer to this question is not mine to discern alone. I am going to ask our leaders to reflect on this question, and I would love to hear from any of you.

But I also have the live mic. And I have something that has not left my heart. Not just as I listened to the conference speakers this week, but as I spoke to my friends about their anguish and pain.

It is a few words that I sometimes say when we are taking up the offering. I can't remember when I started saying this, or where I picked it up. And I doubt that it is original to me.

But when I prayed and asked God what our purpose was, these words kept coming and landing in my lap.

“We bring God’s love to life.”

Will you say that with me? “We bring God’s love to life.”

Because God’s love can be such an abstract thing. But it comes to life when one of our members reaches out to another in love and care.

The beauty of God’s love can be so hard to imagine, but it comes to life in our ears when our choir sings.

God’s love can be so hard to understand, but it comes to life when our children learn the stories of our faith.

God’s love might seem frankly hard to believe, in a world with so much suffering, grief, and pain. But God’s love comes to life when we serve meal at Father Bills, or swing a hammer to repair a home, when we wrap a coat around someone who is cold, or gather our resources together to support the domestic violence shelter, the food pantry, disaster relief efforts, chaplains for soldiers and merchant mariners, and the many, many, other places around this community and around the world that our benevolence dollars touch.

We bring God’s love to life.

I think that is what we do. And I wonder, I wonder, if it might be our purpose.

Each week when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we say to God “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.”

It gives us this lovely image of heaven, as a place where God’s will is always done. I imagine that in heaven God’s love is unmistakable. It is in all, and through all. In fact,

sometimes I think that heaven might be just that, nothing but God's love, and us immersed in it.

Thy kingdom come.

It's our prayer.

It is our reminder that Christian faith is not just about getting people into heaven.

It is about bringing a little of heaven down to Earth.

Our faith is about making this world a little bit more like the kingdom of God. A little bit more like the world God desires, God hopes for.

We bring God's love to life.

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We have some friends whose 2 year old son has this great t-shirt.

It says in big letters: "Boys will be boys." But the second boys is crossed out in red, and corrected, so the phrase reads "Boys will be decent human beings."

I want to end where we began

Because bringing God's love to life is not just a statement of what we already do, but it is a grand challenge that we could embark on together.

There are two ways to live in this world, in the face of widespread sexual abuse long known by most, but which is newly surfacing in our shared public awareness.

We could say, "boys will be boys." We could say, "this kind of thing just happens, its just the way it is."

And we could think that our faith is just about getting us out of this world and into God's loving presence, one fine morning, by and by.

But I don't think that is what this church is all about.

I do not think that is our purpose.

I think our purpose is the harder one. To try to bring a bit of heaven to Earth. To stare down the ways our world is broken and shattered. The ways our world is not like the world God desires. And to set our hands, and feet, and hearts to bringing a little bit of heaven to Earth.

In anxious and anguished times we would not throw our arms up in despair, but dig our hands into the hard work of transforming the world by making our lives into expressions of God's love.

It also calls us to be people of hope.

People who believe that with God, nothing is inevitable. Anything can change.

Heaven can come to Earth.

We can bring God's love to life.