

Trinity 14, 2018
United by the Blood
St. Luke 17:11-19
St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR
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“And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.”

There has been much going on in my heart these last couple of weeks as I found myself sitting at the bedside of my mother-in-law not knowing which side of Heaven she may succumb. Memories of my daughter Marie resurface and thoughts of heaven cloud my eyes with tears of sadness and moments of joy. Despite my private struggles there is also much going on in the world around us at this present time, touching the hearts of many, concerning the Roman Church and the Episcopal as well. It could lead one to feel that the world is in a downward spiral. It is difficult being a Christian at times like these when uncertainty is in the air.

Sitting at my Mother-in-laws bedside I am aware of the fact that being at her bedside feels different than the bedsidings of others I have prayed with, as they have come to the end of their earthly lives. Why does this feel so different? Pondering my emotional state I realize that it has to do with blood...The blood that flows through my mother-in-law's veins is the same blood mingled with my own that once flowed in my daughter Marie and now flows through Elizabeth. The connection is so close that the pain is more deeply felt. It is this 'common blood' that binds us together and increases the reality of life, death and love.

It is been through this experience that a deeper sense of 'Christ in us' has taken on a more profound significance for me. Blood is the identifier of family ties and it is the very blood of Jesus Christ that unites us with our brothers and sisters of the universal church in the eternal love of our Father in Heaven. This love is a love that experiences joy in brotherhood...and sometimes sorrow in loss and deception.

The Roman Catholic Church is suffering now...suffering at it's own hands. Led astray by its own desire for outward appearances it has allowed unimaginable abuses to persist over a very long period of time. It is a sad position to be in...so what is our response?

Our brothers and sisters on the other side of the isle are also in the throws of a theological discernment that is changing the doctrine of the church. In their most recent convention the Episcopal Church has changed their doctrinal stance of marriage between a man and woman. The marriage of opposites is no longer God's position and the marital blessing of same sex couples is now the official position of the church. How should we respond?

It is easy to judge isn't it? Religion has pitted brother against brother for 2,000 years. The message of the Gospel seems to have gotten lost or at least confused. While the church does need to hold itself accountable, our response should not be to throw stones. The Gospel calls us to love and love calls us to pray. We should be praying for our brethren and ourselves that the Holy Spirit would realign our faith and fortitude according to the will of God. It is the acknowledgment and revelation of the 'common blood' of Jesus that has made me realize how unkind I have been to my brothers and sisters of the faith. Once again, the connection is so close that the pain is more deeply felt. I am guilty of praying and thanking God for my place here at St. Andrews, that we are not like those of the Roman Church...that we are not like those of the Episcopal Church. Sound familiar?

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

(St. Luke 18:10-13)

These words, along with recent events, have had a major sobering affect upon me. In our Gospel reading today we saw that ten lepers met Jesus as he was passing through Samaria and Galilee, and all were given

healing. But in the end only one of the ten returned to give glory to God...nine out of the ten got what they wanted from Jesus and apparently moved on with their lives, taking God's offering in Jesus for granted. I will not speak for you, but for myself...this last week has opened my eyes that I have been one of the nine...that I have acted as the Pharisee. The common blood that we will share at our Table today is the same blood the Roman church and the Episcopal Church share in corporately with us. They may have their issues but we must be careful that we are not blinded by our own shortcomings. We are not called to condemn family members whether they be blood relatives by birth or brothers and sisters of the Cross. Blood has been given either way and unites us to each other.

There is a solution to all of this. It is not easy for we are in a fallen state, but it is worth the effort and we heard it today! I wonder if anyone noticed or has truly looked at these words? They are very familiar, given to us by St. Matthew:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all the soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself."

(St. Matthew 22:37-39)

I am becoming more inclined to view our current state of affairs as a reluctance to keep these two commandments...in the right order. If we take a close look I believe we will see that we have been fooling ourselves, to one degree or another, with the perception that we love God first. You see, if we truly put God first we would uphold the love found in the Gospels under all pretenses. To uphold the Gospel truth is love at its best. To love God with our hearts, our souls and our minds gives zero power to the evil of this world to tear the church apart or even stain it with corruption. Only by putting God first can we be secure in the love we offer our brothers and sisters, confident that our tough decisions are correct decisions, that our stance against depravity and exploitation in the church are justifiable and done in love. In this light we would find ourselves praying for our church leaders instead of condemning them.

“And Jesus answering said, were not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save the stranger.”

I pray that you and I become the stranger that puts God first and gives him glory. We must pray for our brethren that they would find that the God that heals them is worthy of their worship and worthy to be followed. And we must pray for ourselves that we recognize the common blood of Jesus running in the veins of the church worldwide connecting us in a divine genetic code.

And it came to pass, as he went to the Cross, that God entered the hearts, the souls and the minds of mankind. *“And he said unto (them), Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.