

Sermon for 12 June 2022@ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Trinity Sunday/Peace with Justice Sunday

Scriptures: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8: (UM743)*Response 2*; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

“Patience”

How much do you read Ecclesiastes? For a time in my life, I was Episcopalian, and one of the results of those years was that I use the Book of Common Prayer’s selection of daily scriptures for my devotions three times a day: In the morning, at suppertime, and at bedtime. It’s a good selection of texts, and gets you acquainted with a lot of the Bible’s most important passages over every two years.

Ecclesiastes is part of the cycle, and it’s tough enough to stand up to anybody who says scripture is not honest about life’s uncertainties and bad periods. Just this week I read Ecclesiastes saying there’s plenty that doesn’t prove life is good or God is love.

That’s what gave me the title for today’s sermon on the Trinity. One thing the belief that God is in three parts is our way of saying I don’t understand a lot about life and death.

How do you talk to God? Like a person, if you’re like me ... and then other times like myself, when I’m working on some fresh insight about myself, such as that I don’t have to stay hitched to an idea after so long, I can go past what happened to me when I was six or sixteen or sixty and see things differently, like I did last week when the therapist I work with pointed out that I’d outgrown a fear or a prejudice or even a way of being down on myself during my work with her.

It’s rich that, this year, Trinity Sunday comes on the same Sunday that the United Methodist celebrates Peace with Justice Sunday. This is a Sunday when we face the flat fact that our purpose as Jesus’ friends is, for a large degree, in not dodging the wrongs in our part of the world and our time in history. I’m pretty convinced we’re in for a considerable period of darkness and uncertainty in this country. What we’re seeing in the committee hearings on January 6 of last year is how fragile democracy is, and how close we came to losing it in one fell swoop last January 6. Trinity Sunday and Peace with Justice Sunday both bring home to us that we’ve got to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves if we face life like Jesus did.

We’re collected here to honor that, and to encourage each other about our power to hope and work for better arrangements with one another, starting with capitalism and going on to sexuality and those special problems that bother each of us in particular when we start to pray and be truthful with

each other up against the great hopes and joys our religion gives each of us uniquely.

Patience. Patience with God. Patience with ourselves. Patience with President Biden. Patience with the Democrats, and impatience with the Republicans ... Patience with myself ... Have you learned anything this past week about forgiving yourself? Has church given you space to hold your own feet to the fire, while at the same time giving you the space to celebrate how blessed you have gotten to be in the past year or two in bravery and freedom to look at things in new and better ways than you ever did, through something you read or someone you talk to regularly about your problems? Can I tell you how it's gotten to me through things I've read lately that we have to work out some system of reparations for Black people in this country? Would you be interested in meeting and reading some of the facts on this I've just finished reading? Is that something that might attract new people to Bethesda if we put it on our website? When I say Trinity stands for patience, I mean patience with God ... and also for God's patience with us. Are you ready to talk about that at Bethesda? Is that your idea of Bible study? Can we be that free talking about faith? Have you time for that?

At the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes, what happens? Want to meet and find out? Think someone in the neighborhood might join us?

Can we get going with something that Laura described from Annual Conference?

Are you willing to stew with me in a group about reaching out to the neighborhood for service projects, or prison projects, or something about gun control? Have you given up on such things? Has salt lost its savor @ this church, at this time?

Patience. Do I sound patient?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, thanks for the Trinity. May we use it well. God, please get busy on it yourself among us so we don't lose interest in the latest news or turn into escapists running the other direction from peace and justice.

Amen.