

## Tim's Sermon, 8/21/16

In the name of God, most merciful, most compassionate!

It has been just a little more than a year since I was ordained a deacon at Grace Cathedral. Never in my wildest imagination while preparing for ordination during three years at School for Deacons did I suspect that my first year as a deacon would contain as much drama, challenge, and yes, heartache as it has for me in transitioning from the unexpected departure of our prior rector to our team of dedicated interim priests anchored by our steadfast and beloved Claire!

Yet, it has also been for me a year of joy, of humble gratitude for being called back as deacon to this parish after 36 years as a parishioner, of living out my diaconal ordination vow of interpreting to the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world, of community building in Jesus' name, of hope after finding love, encouragement, reconciliation, and healing here in the parish in the midst of sadness and uncertainty.

For all of us here in the parish it has been a time of pushing boundaries and taking risks beyond the normal and the expected because much of the customary and familiar have disappeared. It has been a year of navigating uncharted waters of compromise and listening with the heart, of reaching and stretching beyond just being present at our Sunday worship services to hearing what God is calling each of us to do with our lives.

That is why I find today's Gospel reading from Luke so resonating! It is a story of Jesus pushing the boundaries of Sabbath tradition and practices and taking the risk of rejection and disapproval from the local Pharisees by healing a woman in distress from an affliction.

As former Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts-Schori writes in her book *The Heartbeat of God*, Jesus' continual message, his constant work, is pushing the boundaries and crossing the limits that separate us from the reign of God. In today's Gospel reading healing is more important than observing the rules and practices about work on the Sabbath. Purity and acceptability are not part of the invitation to God's table.

Now, I don't think that God is necessarily calling each of us to take risks and push the boundaries of our lives in the radical way in which Julian of Norwich did in the 14<sup>th</sup> century! In his eloquent, deeply moving presentation here recently between services, Bill Stafford, former dean of the Sewanee School of Theology, told us about Julian, a Christian anchoress, hermit, theologian, and mystic who took a vow of stability of place after living an ordinary life in England for her first 30 years. For her next 40 years she stayed in a room next to an English church and communicated with the world through a small shuttered window in the wall while writing with exquisite depth and clarity about her visions of God's love!

No, God may not be calling each of us to become anchoresses and anchors! Rather, the Gospel story reminds us that in our baptismal vows of seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being, God is calling each of us to reach and stretch beyond Sunday mornings here at St. Mary's. We are called to share God's presence and love in new (that is, to ourselves) ministries serving and ministering with others both outside and inside the parish particularly with those who are ill, alone, grieving, hungry, homeless, or without hope and love in their lives.

Former Presiding Bishop Jefferts-Schori writes that faith communities tend to grow when they get beyond self-preservation and focus instead on the needs of others.

Her words speak profoundly to us here at St. Mary's as we strive to sustain and grow by serving others while we heal and reconcile from divisions created over the past nine months.

Here at St. Mary's we are living out our baptismal vows and listening to God's call to push beyond the boundaries of the normal and familiar in order to serve others in Jesus' name. In addition to generous cash donations to community organizations, we have shared our presence and compassion and received the same in return in ministries with others on the margins outside our parish including:

- weekly deliveries of food to senior and disabled recipients in San Francisco,
- packaging meals for impoverished communities worldwide,
- preparing meals for young adults living in a neighborhood residential facility,
- rebuilding homes and non-profit facilities,
- service by youth group members this summer in a school in Kenya,
- sharing programs with people of other faiths to promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, and
- an embryonic social justice ministry ministering with community residents victimized by homelessness, gun violence, and human trafficking.

Parishioners at St. Mary's are also hearing God's call to live out their baptismal vows and push the boundaries inside our parish in ministering with others. Examples are our Stephen and pastoral care ministers, our lay eucharistic ministers, our choir members, our Sunday School teachers, our church staff and volunteers, to name a

few, who stretch the boundaries of their lives to serve others in our parish.

I think of our brother in Christ David Crosson, who has stretched far beyond customary and familiar boundaries. In spite of possible dissonance from other parishioners he heard and courageously acted on God's call to introduce in the parish an initiative of reconciliation and listening to each other with our hearts, which I hope all of us will join.

If each of us takes time to reflect on God's call to live out our baptismal vows, many of us will find we are called to do more, to push and stretch the boundaries of our ministry with others. Each of us is a special child of God. From God each of us has received the gift of life – one wild and precious life according to the poet Mary Oliver. God has given each of us the choice to decide how to live out our baptismal vows and push the boundaries of our one wild and precious life as Jesus did in today's Gospel.

As Mary Oliver wrote:

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
Into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
How to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?

Amen