

This will be a quietish Memorial Day weekend for all of us, few picnics, no parades. No NY Cycle Club visiting the church, and no Invocations given at the track. But it will be a busy weekend on the Internet. Memorial Day prayers will be offered online at many events. I would like to draw your attention to two services occurring later today:

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry will be preaching at a virtual Memorial Service this evening at 6 PM Eastern time to mourn the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hosted by the National Council of Churches. This will be an ecumenical service to remember all those we have lost. The press release for this service says that it will include reflections of “lament, comfort, encouragement, and hope”.<sup>i</sup>

The other event taking place online today is a service at Westminster Abby at 4 PM our time. This is an annual celebration of the Worldwide Anglican Communion.<sup>ii</sup> We don’t talk much about the Anglican Communion these days. There has been a great deal of tension between member provinces in the years since 2003 when the Diocese of New Hampshire elected the first openly gay man as bishop. Many worldwide Anglican provinces were very angry about this step that our Church took and has sought over the ensuing years to eject the Episcopal Church from the Communion. But that has not happened. Archbishop Rowan Williams, and now Archbishop Justin Welby have sought to remind all provinces of the things we have in common rather than focusing on the things that divide us.

Both of these liturgical opportunities are a way for us to broaden our horizons and to see our brothers and sisters of faith as, in fact, our brothers and sisters. It is a chance to see and know God in the face of other faithful Christians.

Our gospel reading from John today is small portion of the long, extended farewell that Jesus gives to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. It’s easy to get distracted by the repetition of phrases and words that John uses. One of these words is glory, or glorify. We find six instances of this word in just this short passage. What does it mean that Jesus is going to be glorified and that this will glorify God?

I came across a helpful phrase to think of when trying to understand this. To glorify God is to make visible the presence of God to the world. That makes the passage a little easier to understand. Jesus is praying to be made visible through his life, sacrifice and resurrection. And ultimately, when Jesus is visible to us, then God is visible and knowable. Jesus prays for the disciple in the passage today; “I am asking this on behalf of those you gave me, Father.” Knowing and following Jesus makes us able to know and be one with God.

In the service broadcast later today celebrating Anglican Communion Sunday I note that the secretary general of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah (E-doe-woo) Idowu-Fearon will open and close the service. I have met, and spent a little time with AB Josiah.

This occurred in the spring of 2004, at a time when I had completed my seminary studies but had not yet been ordained. I went with a group from Trinity Tariffville, led by the Rev. Tom Furrer to Nigeria for some “Christian tourism.” Bishop Josiah was the primate of the Kaduna region of the Anglican Church in Nigeria at that time. We stayed with the bishop at his home in Kaduna which was surrounded by a high wall and guarded 24/7 by a team of security men. In the middle of every night

we heard strange metallic banging and learned that it was a way for the guards to communicate that they were awake, at their post, and that all was well. They simply banged on the pipes on the exterior of the house.

I learned so much on that trip. We attended a prayer meeting with singing and dancing. We toured far flung villages where doctors and nurses treated sick villagers. We saw the partially completed new Kateri Medical Clinic on the main road between Kaduna and Abuja. And we were invited to a very large gathering of all the Anglican parishioners of the diocese at the cathedral. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss what had occurred in the Episcopal Church. It was not a happy meeting. There were several addresses by church leaders including the Rev. Tom Furrer.

You know how every once in a while a sermon or discussion sticks with you even after many years? Well, this gathering has vividly stayed in my memory. A passage was read from the Gospel of Mark chapter 8, “*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’” Mark 8:34*

I found the discussion very upsetting. There were hundreds of people in the cathedral and all who spoke decried the election of Bishop Gene Robinson as being against the Biblical teaching. The people were angry and disparaging in their comments. I must give Bishop Josiah credit, though. He is an inclusive and open-minded man whose beliefs did not entirely match up with those of his parishioners or the Archbishop of Nigeria.

I sat there with the other Americans, and just began shaking because I was so upset at what I was hearing. God hates homosexuals, they said. It’s an abomination, others said. Did these people not know Jesus? Were they glorifying God for others? I don’t feel like that exercise made God more visible. I felt as though I personally was being attacked as a follower of Jesus who loves us all just as we are. I was amazed to find that I had put up my hand to speak. What was I doing? There was nothing I could say to change the minds of these angry people. And as a visitor, and an American and a woman my voice carried absolutely no authority.

But I was forced to stand by a power greater than myself and just say *something*. I don’t remember all the words I spoke. But I remember saying that what Jesus has asked of us is not to judge, not to make false distinctions. “*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*” (Gal. 3:28) What Jesus wants is for us to follow him to Jerusalem and to the cross. At the cross all our differences fall away. All our perceived slights wither. For me, I will take up my cross and follow Jesus.” I didn’t say everything I wanted to say, but at least I said something that was true to me. I sat down still shaking like a leaf. And I thought to myself, at least I did not keep silent. At least I let the God whom I know, who loves and cares for all people, have a word in that room.

Jesus, who was glorified in the cross and in his resurrection, has been made visible to us. For that small moment in time in Kaduna, Nigeria I felt one with the God of glory and with my fellow Episcopalians.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/05/20/presiding-bishop-will-preach-at-ecumenical-memorial-service-on-may-24-for-those-who-have-died-of-covid-19/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/05/20/churches-prepare-to-mark-anglican-communion-sunday-on-may-24/>