Proper 13c – The image of God Aug. 4, 2019

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“Whoever is wise will ponder these things, and consider well the mercies of the Lord.” Psalm 107:43

I am grieving, and our country is grieving again this morning.

Scripture passages from Hosea, Paul and Jesus all point to grief as well; a lack of honoring God’s presence in God’s people. All three of them tell us very plainly that there are right ways to be in relationship with God and our neighbor, and there are wrong ways to do so. Hosea says that God has always loved the people and saved them from slavery in Egypt. But the people have not loved each other and have not loved God. They have walked away from God’s law and God’s loving kindness. “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” (Hosea 11:4) That is what God is like.

And we are human and forget God’s love.

And Paul is always so helpful, isn’t he? He points out specifically our flawed human behaviors that are sometimes just doltish, but sometimes are purposefully mean-spirited. “Are we Christians or not,” Paul asks us?. He writes, For you have died with Christ (that is, we have put our old self behind.) And your life now is with Christ in God. And so, because we are in Christ we have put aside the old ways. Paul then says, “You must get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.” (Col. 3:8) Paul puts aside beautiful language here and just gets down to brass tacks. Put to death these things in you: anger, selfishness and greed.

It was with words in my mind that I read words this week from our National Cathedral. An open letter was posted by the Dean of the National Cathedral, the Bishop of the Diocese of Washington and the Canon Theologian of the Cathedral: One central sentence is this:

*“We have come to accept a level of insult and abuse in political discourse that violates each person’s sacred identity as a child of God.” [[1]](#endnote-1)*

It was written in response to President Trump’s tweets about four congresswomen of color who he said should go back to their own countries, and about Elijah Cummings, The House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairman. The President also condemned a whole city, Baltimore, and said that no human would want to live there.

We are human and we forget God’s love.

And let me be very clear. This is not about politics. This is about human decency. It is about how we treat each other in both the public and private spheres.

And, as if that isn’t enough, we yet again we find ourselves on a Sunday morning grieving over the massacre of innocent people. This time in El Paso and Dayton Ohio. This is the second American mass shooting in 24 hours and the third in a week. Nine are dead in Dayton, 20 are dead in El Paso and two dead in Gilroy, CA.

I am personally grieving this week the death of my ex-husband, Philip, and these events are just almost more than I can bear. Why do we kill ourselves and each other. Why isn’t life; our lives, and the lives of our neighbors, of first importance to us?

Paul continues, “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self according to the image of its Creator.” (Col. 3:10) What is the image of the Creator? Is God white? Is God black or brown? Obviously not. The image of the Creator is goodness and love, It is the image of generosity, understanding, respect, forbearance. And above all, the image of the creator is not devoted to self interest and self aggrandizement.

We are human and we forget God’s love.

In the Gospel reading, one indication of the human predicament is shown in “I” statements.

Luke relates a parable that Jesus tells which is particularly pertinent to my family this week. Brothers are arguing about an inheritance. My sons are gathering for the funeral of their father, and already there is tension in the air.

What’s most telling about this parable to me is the repetition of the word “I”. “What should **I** do?” “**I** will do this, **I** will say to my soul. This person does consult with anyone, and he does not ask God what he should do. Self centeredness and self interest are the things which dominate the man in this parable.

The parable illustrates the message Jesus has for the brothers who are arguing about stuff. He tells of a **rich** man who has had additional good fortune to have success in farming. He now has so many crops to store that he does not have room for them all. This doesn’t seem like a bad thing. It seems like a prudent thing to put aside all you can for your retirement and for possible drought in the future. And he’s fortunate that he has the resources to pull down old barns and build new ones.

AND remember, this man is described as a RICH man. He already has what he needs. So, the parable has a clear message, don’t keep adding more and more to your pile of belongings and your wealth just for the sake of doing so. You can’t take it with you.

At Philip’s house in Sharon the process has started of going through all the possessions. One of my sons and I have already given away bags and bags and bags of clothing, and there are still more closets to clean out. What is too much clothing, or too many crops?

Jesus leaves that for us to answer that question using the Image of the Creator within us. It’s our own conversation that we have with our God about these things. Having wealth itself is not evil, but what we do with it can say something about whether we take our baptismal covenant to heart. Are we a new creation in Christ? Do we care for and respect the dignity of every human being? Do we help to feed and clothe others?

We are human and we forget God’s love.

We have, coincidentally, an insert in our bulletin today written by a member of our diocese speaking to her experiences and those of her mother. Both she and her mother attended Fisk University in Nashville. The mom is Gladys, who is now a deacon in the Episcopal Church following a long and successful career. The daughter, the author of the essay, is Lisa. They have both experienced racism in their lives, although, arguably it is much more subtle now that it was in the 1940s when Gladys went off to college. I ask you to prayerfully read this essay and think about the ways in which your life would be much different than it is now if the color of your skin was different.

I need to say something else about this. Why are we giving you these inserts once a month? Just to give you more paper to recycle? Of course not. It all started with lay and ordained people coming together at last year’s Diocesan Convention to talk and pray about the ongoing issue of racism in our lives. This is not something the bishop came up with and told us we need to do. This is what your fellow Episcopalians in Connecticut feel is a pressing issue for the people of our Church.

The scourge of racism is not a problem that has been solved because we had Barak Obama as our president for eight years. We still do not treat others in this country the way we ourselves want to be treated. And when the president makes disparaging comments about certain people, and insults members of Congress and individual citizens it is a failure to honor the image of God within, and it damages all of us.

I will end with the ending words of the open letter written this week from the National Cathedral.

*On January 21, 2017, Washington National Cathedral hosted an interfaith national prayer service, a sacred tradition to honor the peaceful transfer of political power. We prayed for the President and his young Administration to have “wisdom and grace in the exercise of their duties that they may serve all people of this nation, and promote the dignity and freedom of every person.”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

So, today we have a lot to pray for: our president, our Congress and Judiciary, our country, our church and for ourselves; we who are people who listen to the words of God and try to do our best to love God and our neighbor.

“ our renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.” (Col. 3:11)

1. www.cathedral.org [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)