

“Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe.” Psalm 107:2

I had a great time with family on my recent vacation and I think the high point was that I went to the City to see *Hamilton* with them. Those tunes and lyrics keep reverberating in my head. Here’s one particular song that’s sung by Eliza, Hamilton’s wife. She sings:

*“Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now Look around, look around.”– Lin Manuel Miranda, Hamilton*

Aside from my vacation, two important gatherings of our larger Church have happened this summer.

Our triennial meeting of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church happened earlier this month in Baltimore. The themes this year were certainly brevity and cooperation; get the important stuff discussed and then call it done. As many of you know our Episcopal Church meets as a whole body every third year. Lay and ordained delegates are elected by each diocese. And all the bishops, active and retired, meet as well. Legislation is discussed and voted on by both houses, the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. It was a smaller gathering than normal, shorter than normal, but it **did** happen in person. The one most interesting thing that happened was the decision NOT to vote on prayer book revision but to continue to let the dioceses and parishes use all of the acknowledged liturgies of the Church. Prayer book revision is a very fraught subject in the church and I guess no one was in the mood this year to tackle it head on.

The Lambeth Conference 2022 is going on right now. July 26 to August 8. It’s a meeting of all the Anglican and Episcopal churches all over the world that that are daughter or sister churches of the Church of England. This gathering SHOULD be about the things we have in common in our Anglican Church; kindness towards our brothers and sisters in Christ and cooperation to work on issues together where we can make a difference in people’s lives. But unfortunately, has been dominated by one divisive topic.

This body of bishops and primates of the provinces of the world-wide church (no lay representation here) is not in agreement about LGBTQ+ persons. Many bishops and primates of the Global South do not believe that LGBTQ persons should be married or ordained.

Bishops from 165 countries are gathered in Lambeth, England now. There have only been 15 such conferences in 155 years. This particular conference was postponed in 2018 and then again in 2020. So, it has been fourteen years since the last Lambeth conference. The stated theme of the conference is **“God’s Church for God’s World.”** What does God want for us, God’s people of this world? Knowing the mind of God is impossible, and yet we have some hints; the ten commandments....the Golden Rule....the life of Jesus. None of these bedrock understandings of God

include a condemnation of Gay, Lesbian, Trans or Queer people. God's all encompassing love is just that, all encompassing. It's difficult for us in the US to understand the objections by the African bishops. They have millions more parishioners than we do here in the U. S. and they believe that we are in the wrong by letting LGBTQ persons marry or be ordained in the Episcopal Church. But each province in the Anglican Communion is autonomous. We should be able to agree to disagree and stay in the room together.

The Archbishop of Canterbury runs the conference and is the head of the Anglican Communion. The second in command is The Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon. He is the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. He was a bishop in Nigeria when I first met him here in CT in 2002.

After becoming Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council, Idowu-Fearon said, *"My prayer to God is very simple, that I would be able to be a bridge builder; to create the culture of respect for differences, a culture of accepting people as human beings and loving them for who they are in Christ."*

I was thrilled to have met Josiah. I was his chauffeur as he attended services and preached at various churches in CT. Then in 2004, we renewed our acquaintance when I visited his diocese in Kaduna Nigeria. Later, I met him in 2010 at a conference of the ECCT "Missions Abroad" gathering. He is a remarkable and open-minded man. He told me when I was in Kaduna that when I was ordained to the priesthood, he would welcome me back to Nigeria to celebrate the Eucharist...in a Church that did not allow women's ordination.

That visit to Kaduna in 2004 was very challenging. Boy, did we Americans get an earful from many of the Nigerian Anglicans. Bishop Gene Robinson, our Church's first gay bishop, had been elected in New Hampshire in 2003 and many in the greater Anglican Communion were livid. But not Bishop Josiah. He kept quiet. There was a very contentious meeting of the members of the Kaduna church in their cathedral when we were there. I was amazed to find myself standing up and speaking in that gathering of at least 500. I referred to the scripture of the day,

*Then Jesus said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23 (NRSV)"*

I said that the disciples weren't invited to debate who could follow, who was worthy of being a disciple. Jesus just said, "Follow me." I haven't before or since then had an opportunity to stand and speak to so many about something so difficult. But this was a person call for me. I had to speak. I felt I needed to defend my church and speak the truth that I hear in the Gospels. Jesus, our savior stood up for the poor, the defenseless, the silent, the sick, AND those who are marginalized.

So, let's turn to today's scripture to try to discern, to understand and to take to heart God's desires for us.

First up is Hosea, a prophet of inclusivity bar none. That is, he criticizes ALL people of all stripes. 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) This is what God is like.

That image is very intimate, caring, nonjudgmental. God does not look at each infant and say, oh, I'm not sure I like this one, or this one has different skin or different hair. God lifts every infant to the heart of God. Every person is precious to God.

The psalm echoes this theme; verse 8 among others, *Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy and the wonders he does for the children of God. Psalm 107: 8* We are all children of God.

Paul is next. He points out specifically our flawed human behaviors of judgement. We are sometimes 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 just gets down to brass tacks. Put to death these things in you: anger, selfishness and greed.

So what is the image of the Creator? Is God white? Is God black? Is God straight or gay? God is Spirit and not human. These categories that we have set up judgmentally don't apply to God. The image of the Creator is goodness and love, It is the image of generosity, understanding, respect, forbearance.

In the Gospel reading Luke relates a parable about a person concerned about himself and his worldly things.

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 not consult with anyone, and he does not ask God what he should do.

The parable illustrates the answer Jesus has for brothers who are arguing about a family inheritance. He mentions being on guard against greed. The farmer 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 later years and for possible drought in the future. And the man is fortunate that he has the resources to pull down old barns and build new ones. But he never once in this story thinks about others, only his own ability to eat, drink and be merry.

Are we a new creation in Christ? Do we care for and respect the dignity of every human being? Do we open our hand to help others?

The theme we hear over and over today is to rely on God, not other gods or idols, not falling back on old ways, and not solely looking out for ourselves. God saved the Israelites from slavery and saves us every day so that we may live a life of gratitude and generosity, not selfishness and judgementalism.

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