

“Act Locally, Think Globally (Becoming the Beloved Community)”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 25, 2015

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Holy Scriptures: Matthew 28: 16-20 Mark 10: 46-52

Matthew 28: 16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 10:46-52

The Blind Man of Jericho

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see

again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Children's Sermon on Faithful Stewardship

Harold and the Carrot Seed

Author Ruth Krauss, Illustrator Crockett Johnson, 1945.

A little boy planted a carrot seed. His mother said, "I'm afraid it won't come up." His father said, "I'm afraid it won't come up." And his big brother said, "It won't come up." Every day the little boy pulled up the weeds around the seed and sprinkled the ground with water. But nothing came up. And nothing came up. Everyone kept saying it wouldn't come up. But he still pulled up the weeds around it every day. And sprinkled the ground with water. And then one day a carrot came up. Just as the little boy had known it would.

This is one of my favorite stories because Harold invests himself in helping the tiny carrot seed to grow and bloom and see the light of day. Even though other people said it couldn't be done, Harold believed. Not only did he believe he acted responsibly.

Have you ever been responsible for something precious, like a seed, or a plant, or a doll or teddy bear, or your family cat or dog, or even another person, like a little sister or brother? Every time you act responsibly and take care of God's creation, you are what we call a faithful steward. A steward is someone who is entrusted with taking care of God's people, or pets, or even the earth itself. Everyone here in church today and everyone around the world and even you and me are asked by God to take care, take care of each other, take care

of yourself, take care of the Church and Community.

Have you noticed that every Sunday we receive an offering? We either pass the offering plates or sometimes we come forward to put our offerings in the plates. We do this every Sunday because we truly, deeply want to give and dedicate a portion of our wages, earnings and savings. So we put our personal money into the plates. When we pool our offerings together, we are far more able – more so than we ever could possibly be individually -- to invest in the Church's mission to take care of God's creation, God's community, and, yes, God's people.

You know, it is never too early or too late to begin to be a good and faithful steward. Start now, this week, and faithful stewardship will become a habit, a good habit that you will keep and cherish for the rest of your life. Just like Harold, your offerings and my offerings and all of our offerings together sustain and nurture carrots and pets and people into the fullness God envisions.

Sermon

Becoming the Beloved Community

A child was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story.

From time to time she would take her eyes off the book
and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek.

She then alternately stroked his cheek and then her own.

Finally she spoke up, saying, "*Grandpa, did God make you?*"

"*Yes, sweetheart,*" he said, "*God made me a long time ago.*"

"*Oh,*" she said, "*Grandpa, did God make me, too?*"

"*Yes, indeed honey. God made you just a little while ago.*"

Feeling their cheeks one more time, she observed,

"I think God is getting better at it."

As we overhear the gospel
and the lesson known for the healing of Bartimaeus,
may we be open to the changes
we go through in life and life after life,
May we open ourselves to see the powerful process of spiritual
growth and renewal,
to see and celebrate it
not only for ourselves but for one another as
well.

Becoming the Beloved Community

They came to Jericho.

*As [Jesus of Nazareth] and his disciples and a large crowd were
leaving Jericho,*

*Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by
the roadside.*

*When [Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth,
he began to shout out and say,
"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

*The people surrounding and blocking Bartimaeus from seeing
Jesus*

{sternly, suddenly, and succinctly} ordered him to be quiet. . .

Be quiet!

Hush your mouth!

*Jesus doesn't want to see you! He wants to see
me!*

*So stay in your place, over there by the
side of the road!*

. . . Yet Bartimaeus cried out even more loudly,

"Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Be quiet!

Shush, or someone may hear you, see you, know that you are here!

Be patient; wait; don't make waves;

the change you seek may eventually come to pass.

As the 1970s sit com phenomenon Archie Bunker said to his wife,

"Stifle yourself, Edith!"

Have you ever been ignored?

What did that feel like?

How did it make you feel about yourself?

Or about those who ignored you?

Be quiet.

Your needs don't matter.

Initial reactions can sting, and leave wounds that take oh so long to scar over.

I wonder whether we who have felt the pain of being ignored inflict it on someone else?

How often have you witnessed that folks' – folks like me, folks like us –

have an initial reaction to things and people and ideas that are unexpected or surprising or definitely different.

Sometimes our initial reaction is harsh, or sharp, or violent, or angry, or intolerant,

or a knee jerk reaction

to put down what someone else lifts up.

Or to put someone else down

who might simply be looking for a helping hand.

Or to denigrate that which goes against

what we think should be.

Three years ago in October 2012,
our beloved church members Danl Giles and Wiley
Harris

submitted a prayer request in worship
for us to lift up in our hearts and minds
Malala Yousafzai.

Malala is a Pakistani girl who that week had been shot
by the Taliban because she wanted to learn,
to see the world through her own eyes.

As a young girl, Malala Yousafzai defied the Taliban in Pakistan
and demanded that girls be allowed to receive an education.
She was shot by a Taliban gunman in 2012, but survived.
You see, Malala was born in 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan.
As a child, she became an advocate for girls' education,
which resulted in the Taliban issuing a death threat against
her.

On October 9, 2012, a gunman shot Malala
when she was traveling home from school.
Somehow she survived,
and was flown to London for healing and for her safety.
She could have remained quiet, submissive, afraid, fearful,
yet she spoke up

She has courageously continued to speak out on the importance of education.

She was nominated by Desmond Tutu for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

In 2014, she was nominated again and won,

becoming the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. [\[1\]](#)

*Malala said, "If I win the Nobel Peace Prize,
it would be a great opportunity for me.
If I don't get it, it's not important
because my goal is not to get a Nobel Peace Prize;
my goal is to get peace
and my goal is to see the education of every child."*

Malala was told – verbally, violently, forcefully, culturally – to be quiet.

She responded with courage and grace that she wanted to see,
to see every child, every girl and boy, receive an education.

Is that too much to ask?

Maybe not to we who are privileged and consider ourselves entitled!

Yet to so many

– whether for immigrants in our midst or little girls halfway around the world –

education is a hope, a dream, something that is out of their reach.

Out of their reach,

unless someone hears their cries to see God and to see mercy.

Instead of saying, “Be quiet!”

what do you think might happen

if God’s people acted with love, compassion, grace,

and offered an encouraging word?

Becoming the Beloved Community

... Yet Bartimaeus cried out even more loudly,

“Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.”

And they called the blind man, saying to him,

“Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

So throwing off his cloak,

he sprang up and came to Jesus.

Consider the whole people of God who chose to stand between God and a blind man.

What was once their initial reaction,
their knee jerk reply to tell Bartimaeus to be quiet,
suddenly evolved.

After they heard the Word of Jesus to call Bartimaeus into His presence,

their initial reaction to stifle
became a God-inspired response of
encouragement.

Have you ever been encouraged?

What did that feel like?

How did it make you feel about yourself?

Or about those who encouraged you?

Inspired responses can heal, and leave a gift of confidence that lasts a lifetime.

Everyone here and there and everywhere
needs someone else who believes
in the omnipotence of your being.

Take heart!

Get up!

God is calling you!

Your needs matter to God and to me, and all of us together.

Every human life matters to Jesus.

Black lives matter.

Asian lives matter.

South American and Central American lives matter.

African lives matter.

Every soul on this blessed blue planet spinning in the sky

has a precious life that matters to God,

and, with the grace of God,

may every life matter to the Church of

Jesus Christ.

Becoming the Beloved Community

Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man said to him,

"My teacher let me see again."

Jesus said to him,

"Go; your faith has made you well."

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

To be saved by God is to be made whole,

to become as God intended one to be. [2]

Here the man who cannot see

asks the teacher to help him to learn to see again, to be as God intended.

Here is a man who has seen with his faith

the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth:

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Yet Bartimaeus' inner eye saw the true identity of Christ.

Imagine the relief and release that swept through the heart of the Son of God.

Throughout the scriptures Jesus had been so frustrated

with followers who could not see, would not see

that the man before them is the Son of God.

Just a few days earlier, James and John had approached Jesus, asking for a favor.

He said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

James and John asked whether he would grant them

to sit at his right and left side in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said no.

Yet when he asked Bartimaeus the same exact question,

he said, "My Teacher, let me see again."

Clearly God is not interested in massaging egos,
nor in our vainglory,
nor in our deep desire to be entitled.

Rather God is invested in helping us to see:
to see our strengths, our gifts, our failures;
to see ourselves as we truly are;
to see one another;
to see the hopeful and the
hopeless,
the lost, the last, and the
least.

God is making disciples, and it is not about you or me.
God is making disciples who are all about seeing and hearing,
encouraging and inspiring,
acting, behaving, following, and making a way in
the crowd
for the invisible to see God,
and making a straight way in the
desert
for the refugee, the thirsty,
the girls who want
to go to school,
and who
refuse to be quiet!

Not only that, God is making disciples
who are committed to pushing aside
those who stand in the doorway and block the
way to mercy and justice.

To do so is not that hard!

Anyone can serve. Anyone.

When I was around 15 in 1975, I was deeply moved by an
article in the NY Times.

The front page photo was taken in South Africa in the time of
Apartheid.

It showed a young white American man of around 24
surrounded by Zulu boys and girls in school uniforms.
The reporter asked the American school teacher what he was
teaching the young people.
He responded with such grace.
He said, *"These children are my teachers.
Every day I learn more from them than I can ever teach."*
I felt a stirring in my soul, and my eyes were opened.

So take heart, for Jesus is calling to you.

He will ask you, *"What do you want me to do for you?"*
How will you answer? What will you say?
Where are the gaps in your life?
In Christ's church? In God's city? In the world around us?

What do you need to see?
Whom do you need to encourage?
When and where to you need to make a way for
another soul to see God,
to see the Christ that lives in you?

Becoming the Beloved Community

A teacher asked her class to list what they thought
the Seven Wonders of the world should be.
Then they raised their hands and she called on them.
"The Great Wall of China!"
"The Pyramids of Egypt!"
"The Empire State Building!"

Everyone's hands were up except a child in the last row.

The teacher asked her, *"Do you have any you would like to add?"*

The girl said, *“Well, you want to know what we think are the seven wonders.*

Here is my list: to see, to touch, to listen, to communicate, to taste, to feel, to love.”

Go forth, my friends.

Go on the way, giving thanks and praising God,

Testify only to what you know to be true.

And what have you seen and heard and experienced?

You know.

Words of encouragement are cosmic.

Students enlighten the teacher.

A Pakistani girl rises up from her hospital bed and ignites a movement.

A young American throws off his mantle of entitlement
and learns life lessons from Zulu children.

Anyone can serve. Anyone.

So go ahead and testify.

Be.

Act.

Love.

Share that in Jesus' name the crooked places are made straight.

The blind see.

The deaf hear.

The lame walk.

The addicted are released.

The imprisoned are liberated.

The broken are made whole.

The lost become what God intends.

The dead are raised into new life.

And the Church takes heart,
gets up,

and follows Jesus on the Way.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] <http://www.biography.com/people/malala-yousafzai-21362253>

[2] Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B