

Beloved Community III

June 17, 2018

We are contemplating what it means to be the beloved community here at St. Andrew. In the first installment of this reflection we were inspired by the collect of the day, "Put away from us hurtful things, and give to us those things that are good and beneficial." We also were influenced by Paul's words to the church in Corinth that we are the clay vessels that hold Divine treasure. We identified that divine treasure as the community we share together, the community of our family, our parish, our city, our state, our nation, our world. These "communities" we share are made of clay because they are made of us – you and I – and we have a choice between the nature of our shared life being a place where persons are perplexed, persecuted, struck down, neglected, abandoned – or is our shared community places where people are welcomed, embraced, encouraged, healed, empowered, employed and made to belong. Whoever we are as individuals, we are all vital members of many layers of community and how we give ourselves as vital participants and members of those communities we nurture and cultivate the divine treasure that has been given to us.

In other words, do we live in loving and symbiotic care with others, or are we predominantly falling back upon what is most beneficial to our self? The divine law of the universe is to love God – the ground of ALL being – love neighbor – the partners of all community – as we love ourselves – vital participants of community. This is the divine law passed down through the ages.

There is another law that is far more predominant in our world: LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE -ALL THAT IS ME AND MINE! This philosophy proclaims that our shared communities in the world would all be better if everyone gave all their attention to looking out for themselves. All ethnicities, governments, corporations, individuals – do all that you can for your greatest benefit – highest profit – most comfort – greatest advantage – and everyone will be better for it.

These two streams of philosophy have coexisted since the history of humankind has been recorded and discovered. Beloved community as Jesus taught it – as Mohammed taught it – as Buddha taught it – as the prophets and patriarchs, and rabbis of Jewish tradition taught it – as the early church taught it – as the saints through the ages taught it – as the Dalai lamas have taught it – Beloved Community is NOT practiced when we choose to live for our own benefit and advantage – Beloved Community is only held and treasured when others are as and more important than ourselves and together we share the divine treasure of beloved community.

Last week we were inspired by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's four tenets of beloved community: Tell the truth - keep alive the dream – practice the way – be menders of the breach. The church as the beloved community carries the tradition of living our shared lives for the sake of the redemption and healing of the world around us and for practicing the way of faith, hope, and love with one another.

In this morning's collect we pray, "Keep, O Lord, your household the church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion." Faith is what allows us to trust in the unseen and mysterious work of God all around us. The very power that causes plants to grow, the same love that provides food for the sparrow, the same goodness that brought the beauty of landscape, fecundity of soil, meaning and purpose of life – is the power that will take the smallest act of kindness and the simplicity of our prayers, and like little seeds, be nurtured to produce healing and wellness in one another and in our world.

A beloved community thrives upon faith and love. It is only believing in God's partnership with us that our little acts are recognized as significant. When the church offers prayers on behalf of our community, when it prepares a meal for the sake of the poor, when it shares its resources for the sake of other organizations serving the poor - it is our faith and our love that recognize even the smallest of acts brings forth great good because of God's partnership in our life and work.

A beloved community requires faith and love to invest prayers and intentions for the sake of desperate families being separated and imprisoned. It requires faith and love for a church to offer the Eucharist every week believing by doing so the love and sacrifice of God continues to redeem and heal the world in which we live. It takes faith and love for us to put others before us, to respect the dignity of all persons, to love others and welcome them for who they are, believing they too are clay vessels bearing divine treasure. It takes faith and love for us to be a community known by its generosity and embrace and partnership with the community around us.

Because it is faith and love that gives us the audacity to believe that by doing these things and living our lives in faith and love we are doing far more than the sum of our deeds. We are part of a universal and divine act of healing, redeeming, and restoring the world as the beloved community of God. It is faith and love that allows us to practice the way of Jesus, to keep alive the dream of the ages and sages, to tell the truth of God's love for all creation, and to repair the breach that has separated the people of this world from one another and from themselves.

Amen