Second Sunday after the Epiphany January 15, 2017

All Saints’ Church Year A

Isaiah 49:1-7 I Corinthians 1:1-9

Psalm 40:1-11 John 1:29-42

Kindle within us dear Lord, the Epiphany light of your love. Amen

This morning, I would like us to linger over Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

Here’s a little history as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: Paul spent 18 months in Corinth, one of the richest and flourishing Greek cities of his time. He lived and worked side by side with Sosthenes and others to bring about a Christian community.

A community defined ***no longer by privilege***, but ***by*** ***discipleship***. Peace was not a state of war’s absence and the city’s prosperity, but rather the Peace of Christ that surpasses all human understanding, deeply rooted in wholeness, reconciliation, and humility for all.

John Goodhue at the Men’s Bible Study yesterday morning spoke of the humility of the CEO of his work place and what impact it had on him as a young man. (By the way John just turned 92 yesterday). So many years later, the invitation for all to be welcomed and dignified as needed and honored no matter the age or expertise was remembered by John as if it were yesterday.

Paul taught the Corinthians that community comes as gift, as grace, as love, and not because of birth or status or talents or success. This new way of living together was to model to the world an alternative society to the ruthless “every man and woman for themselves.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu expands on this idea of ***community as gift*** with the African insight of Ubuntu. Ubuntu states clearly that ***to be*** is to be ***we,*** not I. We can only understand ourselves in the face of each other. The only way to understand myself, my name, my face, is through the roadmap of your name, your face and the faces of your ancestors. And so healthy Christian community needs the other, the different, even the strange, to find its path to the Peace of Christ. And the hope of this Peace is not dependent on state of the temporal, the here and now, but rather on something else, so much greater than our individual parts.

Dr. Martin Luther King, whose life we honor tomorrow, when accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, sixteen months after the peaceful march on Washington makes this clear when he said:

“I believe that even amid today’s mortar bursts and whining bullets (Note: Remember it’s December 1964, the Vietnam War was in full tilt), there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men and women.”

What is this “something else” that will lift us up?

St. Paul and MLK inspired by Paul are clear: it will be the Beloved Community, even when all hell is breaking out with bombs, bullets, poverty, pain, and polluted politics. Paul calls us Saints, so privileged, not by our person or the situation we are in, but rather by our calling, by our Vocation, by the way God beckons us. God has branded us with an internal homing device that will bring us to the Kingdom, if, through relying on each other, we become disciples, willing to follow the bread crumbs left by God. As Jesus invites us, “Come and see.”

And we can only hear and listen and walk to this calling within the shining face of each other, we find within the beloved community. Alone, none of us are saints, but together, yes, we are the Saints of God. All Saints! And together we can love each other, even strangers, as if we are loving ourselves and our loved ones. That’s why, as the consecrated bread and wine is lifted up, one of the prayers is, “The Holy Food of God for the Holy People of God.”

Paul leaves Corinth, leaving this calling card of Christian community, but a few years later, Sosthenes seeks him out in Ephesus to say, “We have a problem.” Things are falling apart: there are class divisions, the rich are set against the poor, women are exploited, the poor ignored, and Jew and Gentile, once united, are now creating their own camps, and competing about who owns the best spiritual gift. Greed and self-righteousness are flourishing

Oh my! Paul will roll up his sleeves and take out his pen to admonish their wayward ways, but he initiates the conversation, not by scolding them, but by reaffirming that all gifts come from God. They do not lack any spiritual gift, even though their limited view of spiritual gifts is at the heart of their conflict. They have forgotten. We have gifts and we are gifts, because it is God who is faithful.

And when we forget that our Source is God, we make ourselves into petty gods, preaching a false society of us and them, rich and poor, prisoner and free, Jew and Greek, gay and straight, black and white, housed and the unhoused, saved and the unsaved, the insured and uninsured, men and women, the haves and the have nots.

The Rev. Ray Bonin, who is Priest in Charge of a small mission church in Derry, NH, and who also directs the SonShine Soup Kitchen, which feeds people daily, tells a wonderful story. The soup kitchen relies on responsible volunteers and so he always interviews those who want to volunteer so they know how important their role is in making a healthy community. Two adolescent girls came to him and he shared with them the attributes of a good volunteer, and at the end said, “Oh, and we always dress modestly.”

The next day, the two girls came, driven by their mother, and as they came out of the car, Ray saw that the three women were dressed with their hijab. “Thank you Rev. for inviting us to dress modestly. Modesty is part of our faith, and here we feel safe to dress as ourselves and to serve side by side with you.”

Ray tells that story with tears in his eyes. Why? Because within all of us God has implanted the homing device leading us toward the Beloved Community. And when we experience the Kingdom of God, we know it, and it brings tears to our eyes.

This is the Church’s calling- there is a way of living together as old as creation itself; we are to model to the world an alternative way of being, rejecting the ruthless “every man and woman for themselves.” There are no haves and have nots. We all have because God is faithful. We are called to live God’s faithfulness in us.

How does this calling speak to us here at All Saints’?

We are at a turning point. A hundred years ago, there was a dream for a beautiful intimate cathedral built on the side of a hill that would be a beacon of hope and faith. Those founding mothers and fathers of ours had us in mind as they dug that first trowel of dirt, and they attended to our faith through their commitment to the Beloved Community. I’m sure it wasn’t always easy and it came with sacrifice, with blood, sweat and tears of love.

And now we have the opportunity and the gift to think of parishioners a hundred years from now. How will we attend to their faith? How will we keep them in mind as a vital part of our community?

As members of the vestry over the last year have heard me say, often with a sigh, who would have thought God’s dream for us would come wrapped in a parking lot. Yes, we are securing the safety of our parking needs. What a gift it is to need parking.

Yet the deeper opportunity to answer, is once we are parked, what are coming to as we cross the street? How are we building the Kingdom of God?

Buckle your seat belts. We’re entering into a great journey, as great as when the three kings left their homes to honor a babe in a cradle

We need each one of us….through each one of our faces, as we name our ministries, our gifts, and as we explore who we are, and who we are becoming, as we raise money, as we raise awareness, as we lift up to the world the power of the Beloved Community.

Because, we, like Jesus, with excitement and tears in our voices, are able to say, “Come and see!”

Amen

(the Rev.) Jamie L. Hamilton