

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Whiterocks

Dear St. Elizabeth's Family,

October 8, 2021

We all have our own unique contradictions. We try to be loving, but sometimes we're cranky with the ones we love the most. We want to get our act together, but we get stuck in the same old patterns. We tend to hope for the best and expect the worst.

Somehow that's OK, because after all, we're just human. But what if God seemed to be contradictory? Wouldn't that be unsettling, to say the least?

Consider this saying from our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry: "God loves us just the way we are, and God loves us too much to leave us that way." The first part sounds good, doesn't it? Being filled with God's unconditional, life-giving, merciful love is truly incredible, almost hard to believe. We never want to let go of a feeling like that.

But the second part is much more challenging. None of us likes to change, even when it's God's idea. Anyway, how does needing to change go together with being loved unconditionally? I suppose that, like it or not, this is God's way of telling us the truth and showing us how to become better people. "God loves us just the way we are, and God loves us too much to leave us that way."

Take the Gospel story about the rich young man. He really wanted to follow Jesus, who loved him through and through. He'd studied Scripture and lived according to the commandments. Lovingly, Jesus said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, then follow me." (*Mark 10:21*) The rich young man "was shocked and went away grieving, because he had many possessions." God knew he needed to let go of his attachments if he wanted to be like Jesus, loving others more than himself. But the young man couldn't do that, at least not yet.

The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that "the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (*Hebrews 4:12*) That refers both to the words of Scripture and to Jesus, the living Word. God's love cuts through our defenses and sees into the deepest corners of our hearts, transforming us from the inside out. "God loves us just the way we are, and God loves us too much to leave us that way."

This is not a contradiction. God really does love us unconditionally, just the way we are. God loves the rich young man and God loves you and me, with all our rough edges.

That's just the beginning of how much God loves us. God can see an image of the new people we're becoming, and God's merciful love is waiting to carry us forward. If we just make the first step, God will help us take it from there. Welcome to the church, a community of people who can all say, "I'm not there yet, but with God's love, I'm on my way." Michael+

Gathering in Our Hearts

Prayer for Indigenous Peoples' Day (*adapted by the Rev. Canon Robert Two Bulls, Minneapolis, MN*)
Creator, you bent the earth like a bow until it was one, round, shining planet. At your word the land was drawn into mountains and tundra, forests and prairies; the waters were gathered together into rivers, lakes and seas. Many times, when people crossed these seas from other lands they broke the circle of your creation by their greed and violence and they shattered the lives of others. Creator, renew the circle of the earth and turn the hearts of all people to one another; that they and all the earth may live and be drawn toward you, through the love of Jesus Christ, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit in the circle of the Trinity, forever One. Amen

Scripture Passage Mark 10:17-31 and Hebrews: 4:12-16 (*both in the insert*)

from Psalm 104

Bless the LORD, O my soul; * O LORD my God, how excellent is your greatness!

you are clothed with majesty and splendor.

You wrap yourself with light as with a cloak *

and spread out the heavens like a curtain.

You lay the beams of your chambers in the waters above; *

you make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers *

and flames of fire your servants.

You have set the earth upon its foundations, *

so that it never shall move at any time.

O LORD, how manifold are your works! * in wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures. Hallelujah!

Reflection

We can do it. I know we can. Nurture a community all people can call home. We can do that. Nurture a world every life can share. We can do that too. These two tasks are a vision every person of faith can embrace and pursue. I feel hopeful about our future because our job description is so clear. Wherever we are, whatever we do, however we can: we all strive to create community and protect the Earth. We each contribute to advancing these two principles together. Day by day, we grow them into being. We invite others to join us. Until, one day, we tip the scales to hope and watch the first blessings of peace take shape before us. We can do it. I know we can.

Episcopal Bishop Steven Charleston, Choctaw nation

Remember those among us who are in need of prayer. We give thanks for the rain we've received, for the end of wildfire season and for firefighters. In our church family, we remember Greg, Paul, Matthew, Kathy, Amanda, Julia, Tiarance, Chris, Tony, Leanna, Judy, Connie, Lyn, Sterling, Kaysen, Christopher, Eve, Logan, LeeRoy, Arick, Leo, Hudson, SueAnn, Redrock, Dave & Nora, Tyler, Rodricka, Ina Jane, Peggy and Reuban, and for those who have died. We pray for first responders and medical workers, those from our reservation serving in the Armed Forces and for all veterans. We say the **Lord's Prayer** out loud.

Prayer for Knowledge of God's Creation

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

If you can, join us for in-person worship at St. Elizabeth's on Sundays at 10:00 am.

You can also look for prayers and a spiritual message on Michael Carney's Facebook page.

These short services are recorded every Sunday morning and can be viewed at any time.