

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Whiterocks

Dear St. Elizabeth's Family,

September 10, 2021

When our daughter and son were young teenagers, "car time" was important to us. We lived in a rural area twenty miles from large grocery stores, movie theaters, medical facilities and shopping malls. (Kind of like Whiterocks...) We were all pretty busy, and the thirty minutes we spent driving each way gave us time to talk about what was going on in our lives.

Jesus, of course, did not drive a car, but he knew about conversations like that. The Gospels often mention that he and the disciples were "on the way," walking to the next little town where he'd preach and do healings. Jesus loved to spice things up by asking provocative questions, like "Who do people say that I am?" (*Mark 8:27*)

It's interesting to consider how our neighbors today might respond to that question. Lots of people who don't go to church see Jesus as a great Wisdom teacher, preaching the Great Commandment and the Golden Rule. Others recognize that he was a powerful healer, which attracted crowds to him back in the day. Some have also noticed that he was a social movement organizer, gathering a little community that crossed traditional boundaries of race, gender and economic class. All these qualities of Jesus are still important to us today.

But call him the Messiah, as Peter did? Most people in our world seem uncomfortable with that. To acknowledge Jesus as the Christ ascribes power and authority to him—in other words, if he said something, we'd have to pay attention. As it turned out, even Peter didn't understand what all this really meant.

When Jesus challenged the disciples by asking, "Who do you say that I am?" there were more questions behind that. "Do you understand that suffering is part of my path?" "Do you have the courage to embrace your own suffering, to learn and grow through it?" And most challenging of all, "Are you ready to give up your life for others?"

Like most people today, Peter was not ready. He wanted to be in control (or at least pretend he was) for as long as possible. That severely limited his ability to learn and grow, as well as his usefulness to people in need. This is what Jesus was referring to when he said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it..." Staying in control is not a pathway to spiritual growth.

It's becoming more and more obvious that climate change is accelerating. Just in the past two weeks, wildfires, a hurricane and flash flooding have devastated whole regions of the country and taken dozens of lives. If we insist on conducting business as usual, we're more likely to "lose our lives" than save them. The way we're doing things now is not working, and it's only getting worse.

The wisdom of Jesus tells us to give up the illusion of control, to surrender our will to a higher power (*AA Step 3*). Sacrifices will be required to bring healing to the earth, and the time is now. As Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Michael+

Gathering in Our Hearts

Prayer for Grace

Lord God, Almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Passage Mark 8:27-38 (*in insert*)

from Psalm 51

Open my lips, O Lord,
and my mouth shall show forth your praise.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

Reflection

I know you may worry more than you let on. And I can understand why. I know we have a lot to face right now. But I also know something else about us: however much we may worry, we both believe the outcome is already decided. Good will overcome evil. Love will transform hate. Hope will disperse fear. It may take longer than we want, but it will happen. We know this because chaos only distracts from an unchanging reality: the power, presence and purpose of the Spirit. There is no authority greater in all creation. So it is fine to worry sometimes. It is even fine to try not to let it show. As long as we remember, at the end of the day, why we are never afraid of tomorrow.

Episcopal Bishop Steven Charleston, Choctaw nation

Remember those among us who are in need of prayer. We pray for rain, for safety from wildfires, and for the firefighters who protect us. In our church family, we remember Julia, Tiarance, Chris, Tony, Leanna, Judy, Connie, Lyn, John, Sterling, Kaysen, Christopher, Eve, Logan, LeeRoy, Julia, 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.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. 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.*