A Sermon for World Mission Sunday

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Archdeacon Paul Feheley

Interim Partnership Officer for Africa

The Episcopal Church

A beautiful ancient legend tells how Jesus, after his ascension into heaven, was surrounded by the Holy Angels who began to inquire about his work on earth. Jesus told them about his birth, life, preaching, death, and resurrection, and how he had accomplished the salvation of the world. The angel Gabriel asked, “Well now that your work is finished what plans have you made to ensure that the truth you brought to earth will spread throughout the world? Do they all know what you did for them?"

"Oh, no," said Jesus, "not yet. Right now, only a handful of people know." Gabriel was perplexed. "Then what have you done, to let everyone know about your love for them.

Jesus answered, “I called some fishermen, a tax-collector and a few women to walk along with me as I did my Father’s will”

“Yes, I know about them” said Gabriel, “but what else have you done? What other plans have you made?”

Jesus said, "I've asked my friends to tell other people about me. Those who are told will in turn tell other people and my story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Ultimately, all of humankind will have heard about my life and what I have done."

Gabriel began to lose patience. "But what if your friends grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? What if way down in the twenty-first century, people just do not tell others about you? Haven't you made any other plans? What is plan B?”

Jesus, with a steady gaze fixed on Gabriel said, “I have no plan B. I am depending on them.”

Today, as it annually does on the last Sunday of Epiphany is World Mission Sunday. Our Biblical readings for today include the transfiguration passage from Mark. (9:2-9)

Peter, James, and John go up the mountain with Jesus, and there he is changed – transfigured – in a unique and dramatic way before their eyes. His clothes become ‘dazzling white’ and Moses and Elijah two important figures from Israel’s history join Jesus on the mountain. Peter, a disciple prone to overachieving wants to build three dwellings and stay on the mountain. He covets more than a glimpse of glory. He yearns to stay, bathing in the light of the grandeur of God. As a cloud overshadows them the disciples hear the voice and similar words that were spoken at Jesus’s baptism, “This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him”. The last verse of our passage has the four of them coming down from the mountain and Jesus ordering them to tell no one about what they had seen until after the resurrection.

Two thousand years later we are unlikely to have a transfiguration moment as the three disciples did. However, what we are able to see are ‘glimpses of glory’ in the world around us- in the valiant work of generous people in caring for others, the front-line workers in Covid filled hospitals, neighbor helping neighbor, teachers reaching out to students, clergy and lay workers stretching themselves to the limit because the community is in need. By looking into our world and seeing love compassion and faith many peoples have seen and understood the voice that called Jesus ‘the beloved’.

We need to be able to experience the wonder and mystery of God to live out our baptismal promises. Over the years many have made the mistake of assuming that ordination was the call to ministry. It is in fact baptism that makes us missionaries. In the video forWorld Mission Sunday the Presiding Bishop reminds us that one of the prayers for the candidates of Baptism says, “Send them into the world in witness to your love.”

Pope Francis in his encyclical Evangelii Gaudium, (The Joy of the Gospel) puts it this way: “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the people of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization…”  (section 120).

The childhood skit of inviting people into a tent to ‘see a missionary’ when the only thing in the tent is a mirror is amazingly accurate.

In a pandemic world that has people isolated from each other, weary and struggling, humans still face hunger, loneliness, depression, and a host of other things that threaten to overwhelm us. Into this environment we are given an unprecedented opportunity for mission. People are open to hear the words, actions, and love of Jesus as they never have before. Be it local, national, or international the need to share our faith hope and love is paramount. We too often cautiously wait for the big moment to display our faith. The waiting world needs us to risk, to step out beyond our comfort zone. What small things can we do in love that reveal God’s presence and love? What humble gestures should we offer that display our trust that God is with us and for us? Risk failing, risk disappointment, above all risk letting go and see where God takes you.

The Episcopal Church is there to help you. Today on World Mission Sunday the *Global Mission Digital Tool Kit* is being released. This work is a collaboration of Global Partnerships, the Global Episcopal Mission Network, and the Standing Commission on World Mission. A wide variety of materials will highlight and help us to understand that mission means being present with others, as Jesus was present with us and that as companions in mission, we are open to listening working and sharing with one another.

In Bishop Curry’s video referred to earlier he notes the delightful coincidence that World Mission Sunday and Valentines Day occur together this year. While the secular day is devoted “to the romantic love between people” the sacredness of this day shows us “the length that love would go” as Jesus gives his life for us. Our presiding bishop references the Last Supper and quotes Jesus, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) We are reminded that it is this unconditional love that Jesus gave us and sacrificed himself for the sake of the whole world. After Jesus’s resurrection Bishop Michael points out, “It was that kind of love that he (Jesus) would say ‘Now you must be my witnesses’… to the very ends of the earth in the first century in the twenty first century. You must be my witnesses.”

We are called to change our lives and change our world by our witness so that the way of love and the way of the world are one. The practices for a Jesus-centered life in the Presiding Bishop’s *Way of Love:* Turn - Learn - Pray - Worship - Bless - Go - Rest, enable us to do just that as we follow the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus.

In the ancient legend that began this sermon Jesus says to an impatient and worried Gabriel, ‘I have no plan B. I am depending on them.’ On this World Mission Sunday, and every day going forward the ‘them’ is us. Amen.