

Pentecost 11 Proper 16 – Year C – Track 2 - 8-25-2019

I begin this morning with a statement from our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. Bishop Curry and Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia Bishop James B. Magness are inviting Episcopal churches to take part in a national action to remember and honor the first enslaved Africans who landed in English North America in 1619 by tolling their bells for one minute on Sunday, August 25, 2019 – today - at 3:00 pm. This national bell ringing is among the Healing Day events being held at Fort Monroe National Monument to commemorate the 400th anniversary of that landing.

Bishop Curry says this:

"The National Park Service is commissioning, and asking, churches and people from around this country to commemorate and remember that landing and the bringing of those first enslaved Africans to this country by ringing bells. And if possible, by tolling the bells of churches and to do so on August 25 at 3:00 in the afternoon. I'm inviting us as The Episcopal Church to join in this commemoration as part of our continued work of racial healing and reconciliation. At 3:00 pm we can join together with people of other Christian faiths and people of all faiths to remember those who came as enslaved, who came to a country that one day would proclaim liberty. And so we remember them and pray for a new future for us all."

You might be asking yourselves what this has to do with our readings for today. Why bring this into the middle of our liturgy, and on a Sunday when we're celebrating a baptism! - But I will tell you that it is right there in the Scriptures.

In this wonderful Gospel passage from Luke, we're told "Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God." She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. Imagine what she saw most all of the time. The ground. Her world view was so diminished... So you can imagine, too, her relief and joy at being able to see the world all around her, to look up at the sky, to look into the faces of those she was with! Yes, it was a glorious thing.

But the gospel story doesn't end there. A leader in the synagogue challenges Jesus, accusing him of healing on the Sabbath. And Jesus does what Luke describes in Mary's Magnificat – he brings this mighty leader down from his

throne, by telling him that even the laws regarding the Sabbath leave room for taking care of one's animals – or one's brother and sister. Our gospel passage ends with this: "When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing."

We identify with Jesus and the bent-over woman in this story. We don't think we are the synagogue leader. So we're kind of pleased that "all his opponents" were put to shame. But remember that in this story as in all of the stories, we are each of the characters. We are both the woman stooped over and then lifted to glory, as well as the self-righteous leader of the synagogue who gets his come-uppance and is brought low. We are both.

I remember thinking years ago as I sat with the Magnificat – reading the words, "God has taken the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly." And I realized that – if the mighty have been taken down from their thrones, then they have become the lowly... and then, won't God lift *them* up? If the rich are turned away empty, they may become the poor...

Elizabeth Palmer, writing in Christian Century, says this: "What does it mean for us to be both uplifted in glory and stooped down in humility? It may mean declining to wish terrible things upon the public figures who make ignorant comments about immigrants, and instead working to bring those immigrants into a more just relationship with the political and economic systems from which we profit. It may mean letting go of our deeply held convictions about the right way to worship or vote or live, instead listening for the whisperings of the Spirit—even if that whispering comes in the voice of someone we don't like. It may mean changing our perspective so that the person we regarded as an enemy now looks like a child of God."¹

It may mean changing our perspective. That's precisely what the healing of this bent-over woman is about for us. Jesus comes to heal us – by raising us up to see the people around us, to change our perspective from being all about the ground under *our* feet to really *seeing* the people and the world *around* us. The kingdom of God is not a me-and-Jesus affair. The kingdom of God, the *way* of God, involves each of us, recognizing and responding to the needs of one another.

This is what we heard from the prophet Isaiah in the first reading:

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

That's what God's kingdom looks like. That's what God wants us to be able to see. To see the kingdom of God, with light rising and gloom like noonday, with our own needs satisfied, we must also be able to see the yoke on others' backs – without pointing fingers or speaking evil.

So today we are invited to "remember" something that many of us might never have known – that on August 13th, in 1619 – "20-odd" men and women from Angola in West Africa – who had first been stolen off a Spanish slave ship by pirates – were brought to this country as enslaved persons and sold for food. There was a yoke among us. Those 20-odd men and women were brought low while others were raised high. But Jesus raises us up from being stooped, so that we can now see. Hear Elizabeth Palmer again: "What does it mean for us to be both uplifted in glory and stooped down in humility?... It may mean changing our perspective so that the person we regarded as an enemy now looks like a child of God."

This is all in our Baptismal Covenant, my friends: Will we *persevere* in resisting evil? Meaning will we keep on trying? Will we proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Meaning will we *live* what we say we believe? Will we seek and serve Christ in all persons? *All* persons – the ones we like and the ones we don't? Will we strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

We will answer those questions together when we renew our own baptismal promises as we baptize little Rose this morning. In her baptism, we are proclaiming in ritual what we know to be true: That she is indeed a child of God. And we are committing ourselves to supporting her and one another in our daily efforts to live out the covenant we have made. May we find in her new life the hope and grace to be faithful to the God who loved us all into being.

Amen.

- [Isaiah 58:9b-14](#)
[Psalm 103:1-8](#)
[Hebrews 12:18-29](#)
[Luke 13:10-17](#)

¹ [Elizabeth Palmer](#) Christian Century <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-07/august-21-21st-sunday-ordinary-time?reload=1566685769984>