



Love, Do Good, Bless,
Pray, Offer, Give



A Sermon By
The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell

November 6, 2016

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

Love, Do Good, Bless, Pray, Offer, Give

Daniel 7:1-3. 15-18

Ephesians 1:11-23

Psalm 149

Luke 6:20-31

The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell

Grace Episcopal Church

All Saints' Sunday

November 06, 2016

We are approaching the conclusion of one of the surliest presidential races in recent history. Perhaps one of the most painful dynamics of this election cycle has been the near daily barrage of hostility, cruelty, and the dismissiveness of “others.” The constant torrent of painful rhetoric is reaching a boiling point in these last days before what is arguably one of the most important and divisive presidential elections of our time.

Around our nation, many of our Christian sisters and brothers find themselves confounded about how to vote their values. Several leading evangelical Christians have drawn rigid lines in the sand. Pointing fingers, they accuse one another of misrepresenting principles of faith. Many, in the middle, struggle with whether either of the leading candidates, with two different visions for America, reflect their cherished values. Likewise, progressive Christians are anxious over the future of the nation. Conflicted about their voting options, many Christians are turning to their faith for answers.

Of course our Christian tradition doesn't provide us with a special list of God's chosen leaders for the nations of the world. If only it were that simple. However, the Bible provides us with countless stories of God's character and revelations of who God is. Knowing God and God's character helps us to know how we in turn should act and this knowledge guides us as we make big decisions.

As Christians, Jesus is the most prominent figure we should look to when discerning our future as a nation, as a community, and as individuals. As Christians we know God most fully in Jesus of Nazareth. During his earthly ministry, Jesus served as God's agent and modeled God's value system in everything he did. Demonstrating God's love, Jesus affirmed the divine image in flawed humans of every background. Jesus spiritually equipped his followers to love those outside their comfort zones, to see others as God sees them, and to build bridges across many divides.

And to those who listen, Jesus offers an important message in our gospel text today: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you;

and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:27b-31). Love, do good, bless, pray, offer, give. These words of action from Jesus offer us much insight today.

This rhetoric is in vast contrast to many of the messages we are peppered with in other facets of our lives. And it is certainly unlike the campaign propaganda of any political party. But strangely enough, Jesus was a political man. He wasn't elected to office. In fact our system of democracy would seem foreign to him. But he lived in a political system and the people he knew and loved were a part of political systems, thus Jesus' life and ministry confronted many of the people and systems he encountered. The message we hear today was one of Jesus' major policy statements. The problem “for those who listen” as Jesus deems them, is not that his words are hard to understand but that their clear meaning is so challenging. The rules of engagement of Jesus' reign stand in sharp contrast to the cultural and societal norms of his day and ours.

Jesus was a change agent. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus turns things upside down time and time again. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus talks with those on the margins, challenging the status quo, giving hope to the poor, the outcast, and the sinner, while convicting those who feel certain they are righteous. The message that Jesus brings is a tough one for us. It calls for change of vision, change of behavior, change in our very bones.

Change is often difficult to embrace. If we are to be Christians in word and deed, in integrity and spirit, we are called to embrace the change Jesus offers and we are to be change agents in his name. We are called to love, to do good, to bless and pray, to offer, and to give. We are to be the light of the world, a city on a hill, the salt of the earth. We are to be examples. When others say hate, blame, divide, curse, take; we say, no. That is not who we are. We are followers of Christ Jesus who proclaimed another way, the Kingdom of God. And we are called to live in his way, or at least to try.

Living life the way Jesus taught us will shift our world vision. In terms of voting or any other action. When we seek to live in Jesus' way, our focus shifts from self-interest to love of others. There's no better day to be reminded of this than today, All Saints' Sunday. Today is an important occasion for remembering and celebrating the blessed of the church's story, both ancient and contemporary, those known to us only by legend and history, as well as those known to us in this life. We are reminded today especially that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, the saints, who have gone before us and who are cheering us on as we strive, like they did, to follow Jesus.

In our baptism in Christ, we are called to walk in the way of Jesus, even as the saints before us did. In just a few moments we will baptize four people into Christ's Body, the Church. The baptism will take place in the center aisle at the font, which is in the middle of the walkway. The font is a reminder to us, a sign, that in the waters of baptism, we are confronted with

something. Physically, the font at Grace Church is in the way of our normal path. Similarly, the waters of baptism get in the way of life's normal trajectory. The waters of baptism present a new way of action in Christ. We are called to love, do good, bless, pray, offer, and give in his name. And we are equipped by him to do these things, that the world might know God's love more fully and deeply. May we be so emboldened, so empowered, on All Saints' Day, on Election Day, and always. Amen.