



ST. LUKE'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 26, 2022

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene Ernest Warner

[2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14](#), [Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20](#), [Galatians 5:1,13-25](#), [Luke 9:51-62](#)

Guide us to the still waters, restore us to the green pastures and instill your love in our hearts so we may witness to your mercy for all.

What I am hoping to say today is that we can use our memories of the past to help shape our present so to bring about a better tomorrow -- if we follow the teachings of the gospel, be grounded in the community of the faithful and stay open to the Spirit of God.

A whirlwind of events, causing great anxiety and doubt about what this world is coming to, is spinning around us today. This is not new. When I was coming of age in the late 60's and early 70's we saw a president assassinated, multiple people in our country targeted and killed by angry members of our communities, riots and live coverage of war on our televisions for the first time in our history. Yet there were people then who tried to make our lives and our communities better, and we can do the same today if we invite the Spirit of God into our lives. Caught between opposing natures, the spirit of God and the spirit of the flesh, what can we do? I do not have all the answers, but I believe we can start by doing as we are doing today, worshipping together and asking God to join us together in unity of spirit, a spirit of Love.

Plotinus, a philosopher from the 3rd century wrote about the dual nature of man. He commented "But humanity, in reality, is poised midway between gods and beasts, and inclines now to the one order, now to the other; some men grow like to the divine, others to the brute, the greater number stand neutral. But those that are corrupted to the point of approximating to irrational animals and wild beasts pull the mid-folk about and inflict wrong upon them; the victims are no doubt better than the wrongdoers." This seems as true today as in the 3rd century. The irrational, incendiary rhetoric of some inflames those who might otherwise exhibit kindness and attempt understanding. How can we reach the inflamed and try to calm their waters? The Buddha said "Hatred never ends through hatred, by love alone does it end, this is an ancient truth." And Jesus tells us that we should love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, do to others as we would have them do to us. In today's landscape how can we live up to these teachings? Our readings may provide some insights.

When Elijah asked Elisha what he might do for him before he was taken up, Elisha asked to inherit a double share of his spirit. I can imagine his desire for this as Elisha would be left to carry on God's will without Elijah at his side. It can be daunting to witness on our own, yet God's spirit is always there if we are open to it, and here we have a community of faith to support us.

In the Psalm we hear the cry of one who is seeking God and then, upon reflecting on God's works, realizes there is nowhere God is not present, nothing that God has not touched. God is not seen, yet the effects of His creation are --"Your way was in the sea, and your paths in the great waters, yet your footsteps were not seen." God's unseen love surrounds us all.

The Apostle Paul gives us a stark description of the differences between works of the flesh and the works of the spirit. And Paul also reminds us that Christ has set us free—free to become slaves to love. He tells us the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” How can we love those who exhibit the works of the flesh? There lies the challenge of living our faith.

On June 1, 1310, in the Place de Greve at Paris, France, Margarete Porette was burned to death as a relapsed heretic, for writing a book. I feel a certain sadness for that time as this was common while the Inquisition was at work, seeking to suppress heresy and to check its spread. Perhaps similar sentiments are present today — “silence those who are not like us, remove all evidence that they exist.” Although all copies her book were ordered to be burnt, the Carthusian monks hid some in their monasteries. Because of their actions, the story of her faith exists today.

Margarete had a lovely explanation of how the spirit of love frees us from slavery to the law. She wrote that the soul is a slave to the virtues, as they instruct the soul in proper behavior. In short, the virtues show the soul how to follow the law and be in right relationship with God and with others. She said this state lasts only until Love takes up its dwelling in the soul, and at such time the virtues become the handmaidens of the soul as Love, now the mistress of the soul, allows no transgressions. Love frees us from the spirit of the flesh yet enslaves us to the Spirit of God. Margarete went to her death with composure as she died for what she believed.

I’m not promoting martyrdom, just relating a story of how love can free one from fear and enable witnessing for your faith. It does take commitment and a willingness to follow the examples that Christ left for us in the gospel. I would also note that scholars have pointed out the use of hyperbole in the gospel writings, perhaps meant to capture the attention of the reader and provoke reflection. The gospel story of today may include such language.

In his writing, Luke tells us “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.” There was no second guessing, no pause to reconsider, no turning aside to the right or the left, just a single focus on following God’s will. On the way Jesus passed through a village of Samaritans who “did not receive Him.” James and John asked if He wanted them to call fire down from Heaven to consume the Samaritans. He rebuked them and continued on His way. This was not the time for judgement of others. People came to him, asking to follow him and quickly learned that the path was challenging, the price non-negotiable and payment could not be deferred. Everything you possess, right now, to be fit for the Kingdom of God.

How can we follow such an example in doing God’s will? It seems to ask all that we have and require perfection that is beyond our grasp. But that was Jesus’ path, the question becomes “What is our path today?” It may start with a conscious effort on our part to become more centered in Love. The agape love means loving more than just those around us -- everyone does that, so what credit is it for us to do the same? The agape love is the love of all, even those we respond to with distress or anger, yet who show us where our love needs to grow.

We do not have to approve of them, but try to understand them and perhaps to keep them from self-harm or at least from harming others. To act from a center of Love will take effort and deliberate practice, but as our love grows it will become more natural to respond from that place.

I experience my own shortcomings in attempting to walk this path, but find comfort in my faith, in the Book of Common Prayer and in the community of the church. When the tasks at hand seem overwhelming and I falter, I think of a few words from the Baptismal Covenant, "Will you persevere?" And today I can answer, "I will, with God's help"-- I will persevere in Love.