

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Proper 7
Year C
June 19, 2016

First Reading: I Kings 19:1-15a
Psalm 42 and 43

Second Reading: Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel: Luke 8:26-39

Preached by The Rev. John A. Satula
St. James Episcopal Church – Amesbury, MA

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Amen.

We heard the whole of this reading during the Easter Vigil and I think it is important to hear some parts again today as we continue reeling from the pain of what happened last Sunday in Orlando, FL and as we also commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Charleston Church shooting. And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky. So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; so God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." This comes from the story of Creation from the Book of Genesis. Once God had created everything, God looks over His creation and declares not that it is just good but that it is very good.

“Indeed, it [is] very good.” Very good with its many differences and very good sharing the common bond that God created it all, that we, each one of us, each living creature is God's.

We hear from the creation narrative that God made all of these things; birds, fish, wild animals, all that creeps upon the earth, human beings, God made them all of every kind. We all share a common heritage in that we are all part of God's wonderful creation and yet everything God made, He made with differences, differences from the beginning as we hear the term living creatures “of every kind.” Differences are an integral ingredient within the whole of the creation story and ever since then these differences have continued. Human beings, going all the way back to the beginning of creation, were the same and different, we were all made in the image of God, and yet made differently from the first as we were made male and female. We were each made unique and at the same time, sharing commonalities; gender, race, sexual orientation. The human race is made of differences, many wonderful differences creating a beautiful diversity and still feeling linked with each other as we share our humanity, share being made in God's image and linked also with the rest of creation. Unfortunately, sometimes these differences for some are the cause of fear and suspicion. Instead of seeing beautiful diversity, some are filled with fear, which at times leads to anger and rage and at the worst of times, as we saw last Sunday, as we saw a year ago, as we have seen many times over recently, leads to inexplicable acts of terror.

We are reminded that when God looked over creation at the end of the sixth day, God said it is very good, it is not perfect but it is very good, we are very good, our differences, whether they be race or color or religion or gender or sexual orientation, or

something else, are very good because God made diversity, God filled the world from the first day with diversity creating day and night. What we are called to as Christian people living in this imperfect world, is to make this world as good as we can and one way that finds expression in our lives is by spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. One way that Good News can be lived out is through hospitality and welcome to all, by declaring, as our Church declares, all are welcome in Christ. This is not a mantra we made up or a slogan we came up with to have a slogan, but was one of the last teachings Christ gave us in St. Matthew's Gospel before heading to Golgotha. For by welcoming others He tells us, we are welcoming Him, Our Lord, Our God. We are reminded today from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians that in our differences we find unity because in our differences we form the Body of Christ.

During the Easter season we heard different accounts of the struggles the first disciples faced as they strove to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into their world. We know there was consternation sometimes between them of what this meant. One question they were faced with was, is the Gospel open to the non-Jewish world? We must remember that the first followers of Christ, the disciples, were Jewish. We see throughout the Book of Acts, especially in the lives of Sts. Peter and Paul, the different ways the Spirit moved in their lives helping to shape their understanding of their mission and indeed moving them beyond the boundaries of culture and home as the Spirit did for all the disciples, and directing them to take the Gospel to everyone. Paul's primary ministry was to bring the Gospel to the non-Jewish world, the Gentile world. Paul, like all of us was not perfect and sometimes we struggle with his teachings around different subjects. However, Paul also talks a great deal of the love, strength and unity we all

find in Christ. We hear today one of the most beautiful expressions of those qualities as he writes, “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God. . . There is no longer Jew or Greek – meaning Gentile – there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” An assertion, Paul exclaims signified by our Baptisms and that we as Episcopalians, hold to today.

In the Baptismal Liturgy, just before the candidate is Baptized, he or she is Presented by their sponsors by their full name. So for instance when I was Baptized, I was presented as John Anthony Satula. Once we reach the part of the service called the Baptism, the Priest or Bishop pours water over the candidates head using only their first and middle name—John Anthony I Baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And the same at the Christmation, John Anthony you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever. The reason for this, at Baptism, our last name changes. It does not change on our Social Security Card, or Income Tax Return or Drivers License but it does change. For when we are Baptized we enter the family of the Church and our last names all become Christian. John Anthony Christian or John Anthony Satula Christian signifying our oneness signifying that we are members of the same family, the family of the Body of Christ. And yet when we are baptized we bring our own uniqueness, our own gifts into that Body. For we keep our first names. And through that uniqueness, through our varied differences the Body is strengthened, enhanced, the Body grows and stands as a representation of the diverse creation God intended from the very first day. For our differences come together, are brought together in that Body making us one with each other and with Christ, so there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female,

but the one family, the one Body of Christ that all have a place in no matter who, no matter what we are. No matter our religion, our gender our race, our sexual orientation, for the Body of Christ welcomes us all. And as members of that Body we are called to preach that message, that message of acceptance, of tolerance, of forgiveness, of love, of welcome from one side of the earth to the other. And never to allow fear or suspicion or hatred silence that message the message of Christianity, the message of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul proclaims today that Baptism in Christ welcomes us to join together in our differences, in our diversity becoming the one Body. We may not choose to be Baptized, there are many who have respect for Christians but do not desire to be baptized, we may be struggling in considering Baptism, we may know others who are baptized who we are not fond of, nevertheless, in these circumstances, in all circumstances the message of Baptism is not silenced. Baptism is welcome, it represents welcome, through our Baptisms we are called to be welcoming, remembering that before our Baptisms we were welcomed, welcomed to be baptized. Welcome flows throughout the initiation rite both before and after and therefore flows throughout the faith. In the Gospels, Christ puts no parameters around welcoming and neither must we, for if we do this we are not following His command to bring His message to all people. We are all sisters and brothers, we are all part of the wonderful creation, we are all God's children. When one is hurting, Christ is hurting, the Body of Christ is hurting. Never be afraid to extend welcome to another wondering if that should be done because they appear different, they follow a different lifestyle, they look different. Because when we come down to it my friends we may share similarities but no

two people are ever the same, there are differences, differences that we are shown through creation were part and remain a part of God's plan, differences that are wonderful and beautiful.

There are many both within the LGBTQ community and without, feeling hurt and pain over the tragedy in Orlando, feeling afraid, feeling unwelcome. Through our Baptisms we are called to help bring the light of Christ into that pain. It is okay to feel afraid, it is okay to feel fear when we hear of tragedies like Orlando and Charleston, what we must not allow to happen are for these fears to divide and cause us to lash out at others. We can help, we can help to change the feelings of hate that sometimes dwell within our brothers and sisters, we can help others feel secure and loved, knowing that they are a child of God. Through welcome, we can help and we should demand no less from ourselves. Let us celebrate our Baptism, let us recall our Baptism, let us strive to honor the image of Christ, the image of God, which resides within each of us, in all of our beautiful differences pulled together by our common bond as the family of creation. Honor that image by extending welcome both inside the Church and without just as Christ extended welcome to all. We are all God's creation, God made each one of us, and Christ welcomes each one of us and as the Body of Christ we are called to do likewise and this makes the creation sing out in times of great pain, in the face of horrible tragedy, sing out that we are good, the creation is good, humanity is good, indeed . . . it is, we are very good, indeed we are made in God's image.

To God be Glory, Majesty, Honor and Praise.

Forever and Forever. Amen.

