

Comments on Youth Sunday

Holy Eucharist, Rite I, 8:00 am

John 14:1-14

May 22, 2011

I.

Today is Youth Sunday at the 10:00 am service. That means I will not preach a sermon at that service, but rather the youth will take over with their own presentations. And because there will be no regular sermon then, I will be more brief now.

And I'll begin by telling you what our kids are going to do. Sydney and Evan Ruzicka will be our ushers and will do all the things that ushers normally do, including the offertory and managing the pews as people come to receive Communion.

The acolytes will be Allie Edwards, Reagan Edwards, and Caroline Tibbs. We also will have a second cross carried by Matthew Saucier, who is assisting with teaching Sunday School this month, and with his cross he will lead the Sunday School kids back out to their classes.

The kids also are going to do all the readings. David Hector will offer the First Reading, Sydney Ruzicka will lead us in the Psalm, Evan Ruzicka will do the Second Reading, and Alan Bruce will read the Gospel.

Then, as part of the sermon time, we will have a clever puppet show skit that dramatizes the Gospel. The performers here will be Gracie Gebbia, Abby Nicholson, Gabriel Pellegrin, Lauralee Pellegrin, Caroline Tibbs, and Kate Tibbs.

After that, Matthew Saucier will ask us to say the Nicene Creed, and Laurel Bruce will lead us as we offer the Prayers of the People.

II.

But even though I'm not going to preach, old habits die hard and so I will briefly touch upon today's Gospel reading. Jesus said several important things. One of them was that he was the way, the truth, and the light.

And this is not a metaphor. It is to be taken literally. Jesus is way through which humanity has salvation. We cannot achieve fellowship with God by any means that exclude Jesus. We can care for our families, help the community, support charities, and be good neighbors. Those are good things, but they are not enough for salvation. Good hearted atheists also can do all that.

And we also can't just start with a clean sheet of paper and design some comfortable religious paradigm for ourselves. We start with what actually is. Jesus is truth.

This is one of the traps into the contemporary church can fall. It is the idea that whatever works for us is O.K. But faith is not a consumer product. It's not like going into a store and picking out what you like, and leaving the things don't like on the shelf.

That's a lot like salad bar spirituality. You know how a salad bar works. You take what you want and pass over the things that you don't. But that's not the truth. It's just wishful thinking.

So, in addition to being the way, Jesus also is the truth. And our own preferences do not make real that which is unreal. Truth is an objective reality based on what is, not what we want it to be. Jesus Christ is the truth. He is who says he is. And our acceptance of that has eternal consequences for us.

And that leads to the last point, Jesus is the life. Even before we get to eternity, Jesus is how we find happiness, peace, and fulfillment right now. He offers a life in God known through the Holy Spirit. He sustains our eternal hopes, and we live today in victory over sin and death.

III.

Let's go back to Youth Sunday. We look to our young people to carry on after us. And we want those who follow us to be as dedicated and committed to the faith as the disciples were so long ago.

That's why we have tried to make our Sunday School and youth ministry a priority here at St. Thomas. It's why we encourage our parents to participate, and why we emphasize more and more youth activities.

I invite any of you who are free to do so to come back to our 10:00 am service. If you consider this 8:00 service as your normal Sunday worship, then you might find the 10:00 service to be a preview of things to come.

And a few years from now our worship at St. Thomas might start looking more like the 10:00 service today than our regular 10:00 service. Even so, the basics will stay the same. The bread and the wine still will be consecrated. And as always we will recognize Christ's presence at the Holy Table.

But the words, and the feelings they impart, and the hope that is inherent in young people clearly will come through in our second service today.

I'm reminded of the story about a new priest who came to a parish, and met a man who said he had been a member of the parish for over fifty years. The Priest said, "I imagine you have seen a lot of changes over that time." The man said, "I certainly have, and I opposed every one of them."

IV.

I pray that our attitudes are different. I pray that we always can look for ways to reach out to our young people. And at times that might mean that our music is contemporary. And every prayer we say together might not be from the Book of Common Prayer. God still will be praised and worshipped either way.

And so I urge us, as we participate in the traditions of our worship, to recognize that the younger generations looks at some things differently, as has been case throughout countless generations. And it is up to us to encourage and support them in their own creativity and development as we also welcome them into the worship that we hold so dear. *Amen.*