

The Rev. Erin Hensley

August 27, 2017

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Romans 12:1-8 & Matthew 16:13-20

Working on a Building

In a recent blog post on today's Gospel, Bishop Andy poignantly asserts Jesus as "the spiritual architect of the new people of God."¹ Jesus is working on a building unlike any other. This building, in Greek this *ekklesia*, is comprised of the ones called out to be one, to deliberate and discern the Spirit as they journey together. Jesus is the designer and the design of the Church, the new temple. This new temple, like the former one in Jerusalem, was built on a rock. On the other hand, one cannot pinpoint this temple on a map. This new temple is one of the Spirit of God. As biblical scholars say, "It stands under the rule: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (18:20; cf. Jn 4:21)."²

In times like these, we are reminded that buildings of wood and brick can be torn in two or find themselves in a totally different location overnight. We are reminded that we are not as self-sufficient as we might hope. We are reminded that the Church is indeed where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. Worship does not depend on roofs and chairs and pews. Worship ultimately depends on what God has done and continues to do in the work of Jesus the Christ, then and now. The faithfulness of the Church emerges from the faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth, the one who refused to render evil for evil. The one who chose to participate in the way of God instead of the way of domination, even to the point of offering himself on a cross for the whole world. As one prayer for mission goes, "Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name."

This does not say so that everyone might become a card carrying Episocopalina. This does not say may we bring those who do not know you into our buildings on Sunday mornings. This does not say that we bring those who don't know you to the know things about you. By no means. This is a prayer for mission. This is a prayer for being the new temple. This is a prayer for being Church with a capital C that stretches across the world across time and beyond time. This is a prayer for the power of God that reaches out, that offers oneself for the transformation of the common good, that builds up God's creation, not buildings, not institutions. This is a prayer for times like now when cars and boats are washed away and we wait huddled in bathrooms and at friends homes and check Facebook to share that we are safe and ask if others are, too.

This is our spiritual worship right now. That we find our minds renewed, not conformed to the domination system that says this is My America. This is when we say, this is God's world, this is God's country, the Church, is God's house and we intend to be working on that building and nothing else. We intend to gather in his name wherever we are during Harvey and the others storms of these days to discern and deliberate on what is good and acceptable and perfect. We will not think that we are better than anybody else. We will not treat people like things and things like people. We will not think that white supremacy or even American supremacy is God's way. We will not let Harvey or any other water drown our hope. We will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We will keep the faith in the midst of the storm. We are working on a building. The Church is the building. Jesus is alive. You are one of Jesus' members. You are part of his body. For you not to be here is like Jesus missing a part of himself. And this seems to be the task at hand.

There is so much work to be done here and now and at the same time, the waters are rising. So we pray, we listen, we discern. We gather on and offline as we can, letting go of things and doing a reality check. What is most important to God? What is most important to us? What is the good that needs to be

¹ The Rt. Rev. Andrew C. Doyle "Proper 16A/Ordinary 21A/Pentecost +11 August 27, 2017" *Hitchhiking the Bible*, <http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/search?q=Proper+16A>.

² Allison and Davies as referenced on Bishop Andy's blog post above.

offered in this moment? We cannot do all the good alone. Together though, the arms of love are indeed wide enough. We simply find our part and remember that other parts of us are crying or weeping or waiting or wondering this morning. We stop walking around as if we are alone and start living the truth that we are members of one another. We are intimately connected, wholly interdependent, and beautifully capable of being fully human like the historical Jesus was fully human.

God's got this. God's got us. And we have the world. Jesus has the world through the Church. So in the midst of all extra time of waiting, may we use the time to be renewed. May we remember what is most important and good and acceptable towards the end to which we and all of humanity were made. May we only use power to show forth the power of God, the power of love. These bodies of the body of Jesus are the new temple. So be safe. Be kind to yourself. Try and trust that there is time for discernment. We are not helpless. The world is not helpless. The Lord is working on a building. *Amen.*