

Thinking Globally

Isaiah 56: 1-8; Acts 2: 1-13

October 5, 2014

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(Dedication of the plaque honoring Bishop James K. and Eunice Mathews)

I. Introduction

We celebrate the call that all of us have and our church has had from its very inception, to go out into all the world to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Our Isaiah passage this morning was from a section of the book that we call Third Isaiah, which was written by the prophet as the people moved from exile in Babylon back into Israel. It was a very shaky, scary time for them, and there was a lot of political movement to maintain their cultural purity, so there was a lot of legislation about marriages that were interracial being broken up so that Jews could just be with Jews. There was a lot of fear about the people who were different from them. And in the midst of all that political rigmarole, the Prophet Isaiah speaks these powerful words about God's call being for all of us to build a world community, to acknowledge that we are all brothers and sisters together.

II. A World-side call

The story of Pentecost, of course, is the story of God's empowering us to do that work, that we don't wait for people to come to us to spread the good news and we don't wait for people to understand our language to speak the good news. God gives us the tools and the power to go out into all the world to share the story of our faith, to build a community of justice and peace wherever we are. And the story of our church is the story of that explosion across the face of the earth, almost as soon as Pentecost had happened. It is an affirmation that we are all one people and that we learn and grow most powerfully together, so that our church is the church that it is because of the way that good news has spread across the face of the earth.

III. That call has shaped who are church has become

And as we celebrate the ministry of Bishop and Eunice Mathews today, we'll hear a lot of those stories, but one of them that I always loved to hear is about Eunice's dad, E. Stanley Jones, who was perhaps one of the greatest missionaries in our Methodist history. He went to India and spent his whole career there, and he went expecting to teach the people about Jesus Christ. What he wrote is that he found that he wasn't bringing Christ to India, that Christ was already there and that his role was to start to see the places where Christ was at work in that culture and to be in dialogue and learn from one another.

One of the people that he was in dialogue with was a man by the name of Mahatma Gandhi, and he did a lot of talking to Mr. Gandhi about Christ and he learned a lot from Mr. Gandhi about the power of non-violent resistance. E. Stanley Jones then wrote

about that and as a Methodist missionary, his works ended up in seminaries, Methodist seminaries across the country. A young Baptist seminary student in Boston University School of Theology by the name of Martin Luther King read E. Stanley Jones's work about Gandhi and started the thinking process of what non-violent resistance could do here.

IV. We are changed

Every time that we reach out beyond our borders to engage people who look differently than we do, who think differently than we do, our church is changed and enriched. That kind of story captures the crucial importance of our call to reach out in ministry around the world. We've been doing that here at Metropolitan for many years, and every year we get to hear these stories about people whose lives have been changed because they took the time to go out into a new and strange country to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Some of those are deeply personal and don't always manifest themselves. Some of them are very dramatic life changes.

This year, Kevin Walter decided, "You know what, time for a new job. I'm going to seminary," so he quits his job, starts seminary, and a couple of months later, it is a whole new world. A year or two ago in Nicaragua, the wonderful daughter of our soprano soloist at the second service, who had been so deeply enmeshed in our ministries here went to Nicaragua with our team. Veronica met the very powerful work that was being done by a couple of dental hygienists to work with low-income people in Nicaragua, left her job, gosh, darn it, she left her church too. She had to go to Canada to study, but is now at the top of her class as a dental hygienist and getting ready to go back to Nicaragua. So many of us have had these very powerful experiences because when you go to a different place, you start to see, you get to look with fresh eyes at how and where God is moving, and you come back altered and able to see where God is moving in different ways right where you are.

V. Conclusion

There's a very powerful science fiction book called *The Sparrow* that tells a story of our discovering life on another planet, and while all of the governments of earth are jockeying back and forth with how to establish contact, the Jesuits, who have always been at the forefront of missionary activity, sent a spaceship up to be the first ones to encounter this new culture. That's a wonderful story of the passion that we all are called to share in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and in building a world of justice and peace where we -- and in that case, I guess, a universe of justice and peace -- where we all start to understand that we are all brothers and sisters, all sacred children of the God who created us.

Amen.