



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Fremont, California

SERMON

13, September, 2009. Pentecost 15

Title: Fr. Jo Evans

Text: Mark 8:27-38

Well now.....It really is wonderful to be here. My heart and mind are right back in 1978. There is something very seductive about Reminiscence and Nostalgia; however, both can become maudlin and rather sad if they were not kept in check and have little to offer the here and now.

If I were allowed to reminisce I would remember the joy, the excitement, and the privilege of being of being allowed to be acting rector at this splendid parish for five months all those years ago. I would remember love and friendship shared. I would remember celebrating the Eucharist both here (Little Church and larger sanctuary) and in the High Sierras on the parish backpack....using a Sierra Cup as a chalice and my bandana rolled up as a dog collar. I would remember those early stages of friendships formed and my being here now, in this place is living proof that those friendships have lasted over 30 years---those days to this---and for that friendship and love I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

On a lighter note you taught me that all clerical shirts need not be black and that there is a spiritual dimension in helium balloons.

But now enough of nostalgia and reminiscence...

What of today's gospel reading 11 verses from St Mark 11 verses that contain some heady and important theological truths. This morning however, as a text I am content with just the first six words of that important passage---a passage which start with the words, "Jesus and his disciples set out" From these 6 words I can detect two very important Christian concepts and ideas which are of permanent importance to both our faith and the life of the church---the local church and the church environment.

The first thing I want to focus on is the four words "Jesus and his disciples". These few at first sight merely are introductory words, tell us of humanity....Jesus as a person---his disciples are people. One of the great truths of the Incarnation which must be allowed to extend beyond Christmas, is that Christian faith is born not out of ideas not out of philosophical principles and ideals but out of a person – the person of Jesus. It is this need to focus on the person of Jesus which must emerge from those familiar words from John..."the word was made flesh:" The whole idea and existence of God is revealed in the person of Jesus who came to be seen as both Son of God and Son of Man.

The "humanizing" (if there is such a word) this humanizing of God in one person of Jesus, then develops and grows in other people....in the words of my text "the Disciples. Thus four words have to go together "Jesus and his disciples". Jesus on his own, is stationary. The disciples can only be disciples when they attached with Jesus.

If we make a quantum leap and move all this into the present day, into the complexities of the first decade of the 21st century, then all of a sudden the spotlight falls on us...falls on you and falls on me. The ever present presence of Jesus---"felt", "experienced"—and and love through an awareness of God and awareness of His Holy Spirit, means we now become these self-same disciples.

"Jesus and his disciples", the opening words of my text, do not just point us backwards, to a distant point in history 2000 years ago, these words must speak to us today. One of our Eucharistic Prayers in Common Worship, and I suspect one of yours as well begins with the words "The Lord is here" "His Spirit is with us" Note the tense of the verb "The Lord IS here.. not was here. His Spirit IS with us not was with us." So here we

are in the here and now---no room I fear for too much nostalgia and reminiscences. Christian discipleship in the life of the Christian Church is our responsibility, our challenge and our task as together we rejoice in the presence of God revealed in the person of Jesus and lived out by us his disciples.

How do we do this?

What must we do?

A part of the answer lies in the last two words of my text. "Jesus and his disciples SET OUT". First, to set out denies us two things we cannot internalize our faith, and secondly to "set out" denies us the right to stand still.

There is a very real sense in which neither the ministry of Jesus, nor the life of the church, can stand still. One of the really strong characteristics which emerges from the gospel narratives is how Jesus seems constantly on the move. We all know the purple passages of the Gospels...Jesus did such and so or aid so and s. What we sometimes miss is the introductory sentence which almost invariably says "Jesus then went from so and so to such and such a place. All this suggests Jesus seldom stood still. And it is from this very basic fact that an important truth emerges for the life of the church. The church too, like Jesus and the Disciples must SET OUT. This means looking outwards and it means not standing still.

Here at St. James', Just as in the case in my last parish at St. Peter's Harbourn in the UK, you are and they are in a time of change. I'm not sure whether you make much use of the work "interregnum" for that period of time when there is not a Vicar or Rector. I hope, in a way, that you don't use it as much as they do in England. The word interregnum comes from the Latin words meaning "in between rules". I don't like it, mainly because it implies that nothing can happen without a ruler, and of course it can. I have been fascinated to read in The Window, thank you Bobbie for making sure I receive it---fascinated by the specialist ministry here at St. James with Kathy and David. A plan, well worked out, and welcomed Interim Ministry---exercised by the people with a calling for just such a ministry is so good and so positive. No such ministry is found in the UK and I wish it would be introduced. No Vicar or Rector is indispensable and a church family should always be able to move itself onward, and forward, indeed, to "set out" of course it should.

However and it's a big however, this can be so much easier if there is a plan that can come from an Interim Ministry. I just wish the Christian family at St. Peter's could benefit from such a Ministry.

So here we are Disciples of Jesus, all set, I hope, to set out.

We get the strength to do this through the two prongs of communion---the first prong is communion with each other---with those we know and love and importantly with those we may not know so well. The second prong of communion is communion with God, communion through prayer and communion through the Holy Eucharist which enables us to draw near with faith, to approach the altar with open empty hands, and reach out to receive the love of Go, mysteriously given o us in the precious gifts of bread and wine. When we can do this we can receive the love, the courage, and the hope to help us move forward. Mark 8:27 can then speak directly to us and to our church. "Jesus and his disciples set out". Amen

The Rev. Fr. Jo Evans
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ABOUT THE PREACHER: In 1978, our rector Boyd Lyon and Father Jo Evans of Marston Green in England made arrangements for an exchange of priests, which included parish, house and car. While Boyd and Barbara were at St. Leonard's during the months from April to August, Father Jo and his wife Sue along with their two sons Martin and David were with us at St. James'. During this time friendships and memories were made as we became used to a different voice from the pulpit. It was a special experience for both congregations. In time many of us ventured over "the pond" to visit them in England and several from Marston Green have come to see us to reminisce about the good times that were shared in 1978. Father Jo and Sue have visited us twice since then, first in 1992 and then again in 1997. He retired last September and they are now planning another visit. They arrive on September 8th for an 8 day visit and plan to be at St. James' on Sunday, September 13th. For those of us that know them it will be a welcomed visit. Everyone is encouraged to greet them and get acquainted. They are truly a part of St. James' wonderful history. Submitted by: Bobbie Tomkinson for The Window: The Newsletter of St. James' Episcopal Church in Fremont, CA. August 2009