

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable to you my God and my strength

Please be seated.

It is a privilege to be here and especially at this moment in Fr John's life and your life as a congregation. This time of mourning the loss of his mother. It was meant to be a time for John and me to catch up on our friendship and spend time together, instead it has become a God thing where I could grieve with him as he prepared his plans for the funeral and made his arrangements to fly back for a funeral which will happen later today in Joplin Missouri. And then I could also give him the comfort that you are all being cared for on this Sunday.

In the words of the the Book of Common prayer we say at moments like this:

Comfort us in our sorrows at the death of our sister Eleanor; let our faith be our consolation, and eternal life our hope. And Give rest, O Christ, to your servant, Eleanor, with your saints, where sorrow and pain are no more, neither sighing, but life everlasting.

This is the essence of what we believe that when life here ends, it continues in the loving arms of Jesus.

Rest In Peace, Eleanor. And receive comfort Fr John in your sorrow.

Today's Gospel is one of Jesus' prophetic moments. It comes in Luke at the end of a long teaching about the dangers of possessions.

Two weeks ago we had the story of the rich man building larger a bigger barns to hold all his wealth - and once built God says, you fool. This very night your life is demanded of you.

Then last week we had the command to be prepared and to give alms to the poor. And the caution that if the owner of the house had only know when the thief was coming he or she would have stopped the thief from breaking in and stealing.

And finally today we have this strange gospel that feels dark and hard to understand. We have some in the Christian community who would make this about end times but much more likely it should be interpreted in Jesus' time and our time. Jesus whose whole mission was to come and light a fire in the world. To teach a different way to live - a way we see throughout the gospel - as the US Presiding Bishop says, A way of Love. Love for each other and Love for God.

Carrying that message forward it makes sense when we talk about an ALL consuming love - a fire - dividing households. We can even see that today in the very different ways that Christians seem to live that love - or find excuses for not living it.

There is no doubt who Jesus means we should love. The story of Who is our Neighbor - which we had several weeks back, already answered that question. Obviously anyone who we meet, especially those hurting and in need, are our neighbor.

I live in a country that is struggling with that issue right now with persons seeking asylum, and other immigrants (documented or undocumented). We certainly can see what Jesus is talking about when he says that the fire will create tension:

*"From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be—
Three against two,
and two against three;
Father against son,
and son against father;
Mother against daughter,
and daughter against mother;
Mother-in-law against bride,
and bride against mother-in-law."*

That seems to be a living and breathing model in my country as we speak. Often families cannot talk politics or theology at the family dinner table. Often I think it is really about who, what, how and if - to live that love. I know Europe, too has struggled with this issue and I suspect have some of the same disagreements.

As a Deacon in the church for the last 35 years, a part of my call is to be prophetic to the Church. In the ordination vows of a Deacon in the US Book of Common Prayer, and I suspect your Book of Common Prayer, is very similar, the Bishop says to the prospective Deacon:

“You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.”

Powerful words and they truly separate the role of a deacon from the role of a priest

One of my easiest ways to explain this difference is going to the Moment of 9/11.....

I often find myself struggling to find ways to say uncomfortable things to a divided church. Often though, we need to go to the simple - and ask - what does love demand that I do?

The last part of the Gospel then may even clarify some of what we have just talked about. In the words of the Message translation:

“You know how to tell a change in the weather, so don't tell me you can't tell a change in the season, the God-season we're in right now. You don't have to be a genius to understand these things. Just use your common sense.”

There was no doubt in the Samaritans eyes when he came across the man who was beaten, what he should do - it was common sense. It was common decency. It was common humanity. It was Love of neighbor.

We too need to use our common sense in a world that has found a way to make excuses for why or how not to love.

1st John simplifies all of this with these words:

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them..... We love because he first loved us.”

The writer of 1st John continues:

“Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters (hear neighbor also), are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister (neighbor) whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters (neighbor) also.

Simple! We have to love each other to truly learn to love God.

So go, love each and every person you meet today and every day! Work for Justice and peace among all people in a divide and troubled world. Respect the dignity of every human being and encourage our governments to do the same.

That is love - that is common sense. That is God sense!

In the name of God who Created, Loves and Strengthens us. Amen.