

All Saints Episcopal Church  
By the Rev. Justin R. Cannon  
September 18, 2016  
Cosmos Sunday

Just before he dismissed them to go to Eucharist a Sunday school teacher asked the children, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" Young Annie replied, "Because people are sleeping" That joke has absolutely nothing to do with my sermon, but I wanted to make sure you all were fully with me.

In the Old Testament lesson from the Proverbs that we heard today, we hear a messianic prophesy of One who was with God in the beginning of creation. "When he established the heavens I was there . . . When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him." This makes me think of what Saint John wrote some five or six hundred years later, speaking of Christ, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Or as Saint Paul writes in the Epistle we heard today, "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

In other words, everything that exists comes from God. It finds its source in God. It's being emanates from God, and it is in God that we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). The entire cosmos comes to us as an expression of the abundance of God's creative, benevolent force. The life we have is a gift. This planet that we have is a gift from God. Everyday of our life is a gift from our Creator. Every blessing, every opportunity to grow is freely given to us from God. Our very being is a gift from God. And further, it is not because of us that trees grow and the waters roar over the face of the earth, but we depend on these creations. Without trees our air would not regenerate, without water in days we would all be dead. And there's nothing you or I have done to earn this provision. This entire cosmos is an expression of God's abundance, provision, and blessing. Indeed, our very life.

Given this cosmic perspective, our life of faith here at All Saints is not simply another membership, a social club, or another nonprofit on our list of organizations that we support. In her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* Annie Dillard writes:

"I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of the power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flare; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may walk someday and take offense; or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return." [read again]

In other words, coming to church—being church together—is not simply a pleasant time together, some elegant or heartwarming affair. When we gather together we are inviting into this space the living God. We are inviting God—a powerful force and agent of change. She says

“Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flare; they should lash us to our pews.” In other words, we are here to encounter a powerful God, and this is not something to take lightly. Our God may draw us to places from which we can never return! In fact, all that we have, and all that we are will be asked of us.

I recently came across a blog with a post entitled “Christianity’s Not for Cowards” and would like to share an excerpt from it with you:

*“I used to think Christianity was for cowards – a crutch to prop up the weak. Then I surrendered my life to Christ and learned how utterly clueless I was.*

*An authentic faith in Jesus is nothing to mess around with. Because it messes with you first. Many people become Christians because they believe it will somehow make their lives easier. Blessed? For sure. Easier? Not so much.*

*When you start digging in to God’s Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, it forces you (as it did me) to come face to face with your selfishness and depravity – and sprint the other way. You must allow God to completely transform your life, changing—or totally flipping—your beliefs, priorities, and behavior. You must stop caring about frivolous things and start caring about eternal things.*

*Authentic faith is not for the faint of heart. And it’s definitely not for cowards.”*

This life of faith demands everything from us. Our journey of faith is a journey of offering our lives—all that we are and all that we have back to God as an offering of “praise and thanksgiving,” to borrow language from our liturgy. One bible commentator states, “Scripturally, we are taught that we are to give 100 percent to God.... We own nothing. We are stewards of all we have. And as a sign that we know that to be true, we give back to God of our time, our abilities and our money.” How we live and move and have our being—how we spend our time and even our treasure is actually a profound statement of faith. There is the saying, “Don’t tell me what you believe. Give me your bank statement and your calendar and I will tell you what you believe.”

Attending worship, participating in the Sacramental life of the church, spending time in day to day life in prayer, the Christian practice of tithing, these aren’t just things we do because we feel good about them, but they are our way of acknowledging that we are stewards of all that we have. These responses to God’s movement in life, indeed are “meet and right and our bounden duty.” Our offering of our life and labor to the Lord is an acknowledgment of this truth that all we have is a gift from God. As expressed in the book of Chronicles, “All things come of thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14b). Are you ready to give your all to God?

Along these lines, in closing my sermon I want to share with you a Sufi parable that was first shared with me by the Rev. M.R. Ritley, who was an Episcopal priest and my first spiritual director. It is called, “Following the Way” . . .

***This is the lesson on following the Way. Remember it.***

***How do you follow the way?***

*Go where you are sent.*

*Wait till you are shown what to do.*

*Do it with the whole self.*

*Remain till you have done what you were sent to do.*

*Walk away with empty hands.*

***How much will it cost?***

*The cost is everything, for all you are and all you have will be asked of you before the journey runs its course.*

***How will you know your fellow travelers?***

*Their faces are marked by the scars of love.*

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*No one will ever tell you that the Way is easy: only that it is possible.*

*No one can tell you if the journey is worthwhile, for your wages are concealed in the hand of God, and will be shown you only on the last day of eternity.*

*But whoever chooses to follow the Way will have the joyous company of God's beloved fools as fellow travelers, and a resting place, at journey's end, in the Mecca of the heart.*

***This is the lesson on following the Way. Remember it.***

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