

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

This one scares me to death.

Every time!

Have you ever had the occasion to notice suddenly
that everyone was looking at you waiting for an answer,
and you have no idea what the question was
because you were day-dreaming
or in some other way not paying attention?

I imagine that is the same feeling in the pit of the stomach
that the disciples felt when Jesus turned to them and asked,
What were you arguing about on the way?

What indeed!

There are people going to bed tonight who haven't had enough to eat.

There are people right now hiding in fear for their lives.

There are people here in our very town who slept out last night
without a roof over their heads.

Not because they were camping for enjoyment, but because they had no choice.

Last night it wasn't that bad.

but what will it be like in three months time,
when the temperature drops below freezing most nights.

And that's not all.

There are people outside our doors who are lost and confused,
wandering in spiritual darkness without hope.

Searching for some kind of meaning in theirs lives.

And if we are brutally honest with ourselves,
many of us are in the same boat.

I can't shake the image of Jesus walking down the road

sharing with us his beloved disciples,

the great mystery of hope that is the resurrection and the kingdom of God
and we miss it

because we were all arguing among ourselves

about how to solve the problems in the church.

When Jesus turns to us TODAY,

right now,

and says, “What were you arguing about on the way?”

I hope you feel as uncomfortable as I do.

Like I said, it scares me to death.

Every time.

Most recently we’ve been arguing among the progressives and the populists,
about the problems of race in our community and history,

but you know, that isn’t really what we are arguing about,

it’s just the excuse we use to have the argument....

this time.

In some ways it is the same argument that the disciples were having –
who is the greatest;

who will have more power and who will have less.

Who’s really in charge.

And if we work real hard to take all the politics out of it,

almost impossible I know,

it might even be seen

as an argument over which of the three legs

of our beloved Episcopal three legged stool is the greatest.

Scripture, Tradition, or Reason.

But in so many ways it is an older argument still;

an argument that the church has been having for most of its life;

ever since the word of God was written down,

and probably even before it was written down.

How do we interpret scripture.

How do we read scripture

and discern what it is saying about God's will for us.

And who's interpretation will have authority.

This argument has been going on quietly in the Anglican church for its entire life,

and yet it is not always a quiet argument.

At different times it has exploded.

Times like the Council of Whitby,

where we argued about whether the Celtic way of interpreting scripture

was the right way,

or whether the Roman way of interpreting scripture

was the right way.

Or times like the Reformation,

where we argued about whether the Reformed interpretation

or the Catholic interpretation was correct.

Or times like the English Civil War,

where we argued about whether the Anglican interpretation of scripture

was correct,

or whether the Puritan interpretation of scripture

was correct.

To read the arguments made in these times gone by,

made for many different specific reasons,

is to hear again the same general arguments

surrounding the interpretation of scripture that we hear today.

And I wonder if those arguments will ever be settled,

or if they ever can be settled,

and even more surprisingly, if they ever *should* be settled.

When the argument goes on gently,

at the level of careful debate and honest discourse,
it serves to reveal and build up
the richness and depth of the faith of the community.

When it explodes, ego gets in the way.

Debate gives way to dispute,
and discourse falls to quarreling,
yielding only the fruits of division and schism.

We find ourselves forced to declare winners and losers,
and the debate ends for a while
and we are much the poorer for it.

Listen again to the words of James.

“Where there is envy and selfish ambition,
there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

But the wisdom from on high is first pure, then peaceable,
gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits,
without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”

What if this dissent within the larger church,
as well as the dissent that crops up in even the smallest of churches,
has been sent to us as a gift from God
to remind us of the folly of our selfish ambition.

To remind us “not to be anxious about earthly things,
but to love things heavenly;
and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away,
to hold fast to those that shall endure.”

To remind us of what is really, and truly important.

We here at Grace are embarking on a new adventure.

It has been a difficult couple of years as we are riding out this pandemic
and we wouldn't be human

if we didn't have our share of bumps and bruises along the way.
Now as we begin the hard work of reopening and re-energizing,
I hope we can look back and begin to see these struggles in a new light,
as opportunities for God's molding and forming grace
to work on us,
and in us,
and through us.

If there is one thing I have learned, it is that nothing is wasted with God.

Nothing is worthless with God.

When we draw near to God,

God draws nearer to us,

and God becomes known in our works.

In the weeks ahead, as we begin to resume our ministries,

I ask you to think about what you have learned about yourself.

To reflect on how this pandemic has changed you.

How have you changed your priorities

and what might that say

about how God has been working on you.

We who are servants of Christ must be servants to all.

We cannot look away when injustice is done.

We cannot let our hearts get hardened.

The Spirit of God is calling;

calling us out of ourselves.

Do not be afraid. There is work to be done.

Let us pray:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son:

Look with compassion on the whole human family;

take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;

break down the walls that separate us unite us in bonds of love;

and work through our struggle and confusion
to accomplish your purposes on earth;
that, in your good time,
all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.