



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

306 N. Division Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 • (734) 663-0518 • www.standrewsaa.org

Sermon for Sunday, October 7, 2018

Proper 22

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Genesis 2:18-24 | Psalm 8 | Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12 | Mark 10:2-16

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder.” Or “separate,” as the new translation reads.

I've said those words over three hundred times in my priestly career. Next week I'll say them twice. And I have no doubt that for all the times I've said that sentence, at that moment, the two people for whom it was being said were absolutely convinced that nothing, or no one, could ever separate them. Sadly, it doesn't always work out that way. The reasons why relationships fall apart are about as numerous as there are people who enter into them in the first place. The person who can figure that out can have my job, anytime.

I don't pretend to be an expert on marriage. I'm just the guy who confers a blessing on the sacrament that two people choose to share with each other. What I do know something about, is what it means to live a sacramental life; and so do all of you. By virtue of our baptism, we all live in God's presence and power, in a community of people bound together as a sacramental family through which we come to know God, ourselves, and each other, more fully.

For centuries, theologians have written about the sacraments. With its tendency to be concise, our own Prayer Book perhaps says it best in describing a sacrament as an, “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace ... as a means by which we receive that grace.” The water and oil at baptism, the bread and wine at the Eucharist, the vows and rings exchanged at weddings ... these visibly symbolize our recognition that something holy is going on inside and amongst us. The sacraments are a way that God gets into our lives by bringing us closer. A prime example of this closeness is the common life we share as God's children in community as a Church. What the sacraments are not, are anyone's or any group's private property. One thing that is not compatible with a sacramental life is isolation. It's hard to make a positive impact on the world when you are shut off from it; just as it is hard for a marriage to thrive when one person dominates the relationship.

A group of people called together as a church by something as intangible as God's spirit.... Two individuals drawn together by something as mysterious as mutual love and

respect.... are by their nature going to be compelled to look outward. These are examples of God's presence creating community and family, a sacramental life of very visible people held together by an inward and spiritual sustenance that can't be defined or pinned down, but only shared. If this means anything to us, then our response can be nothing less than trusting God to provide the strength and wisdom we need to answer this call to fully live this life, and yet not confuse it for paradise, but for the road to it.

People look for all sorts of things in marriages and families, in communities and churches. Sometimes they find it; sometimes not. Sometimes these relationships thrive; sometimes they die. We all have our own theories on why that is. And as long as God continues to equip us with individual, self-determined minds, those personal theories, as sensible as they may sound to us, will not be very helpful in the larger scheme of things. What is helpful, in all human relationships, is to first seek God's presence and God's will in them, before getting wrapped up in what we think we want out of the relationship.

Each one of us is equipped with a sufficient amount of Grace to offer the love we have known in God to someone else. That person could be your spouse, your children, a friend or neighbor, or someone you have yet to meet. Whoever that is, you have a responsibility to that person, and they to you: a sacred responsibility to confer a blessing.

But, we all know that it is not as easy as it sounds. We could do better at fulfilling that responsibility. There is nothing in our current national discourse that is geared toward blessing. That is, unless you look, think and vote the way I do. It's been that way for far too long. There is no easy answer to resolving this discord that is tearing our society apart. There is plenty of fuel to keep the rancor alive and well for a long time. Is that what we want? No marriage or church could survive under such conditions. Do we think our nation can?

Is there any way we can get beyond our hurt? Can we take a good and total look at ourselves and what that our gut tells us to attack, distrust and curse? I don't know; the scars are pretty deep, but I hope we are not beyond that possibility. If we can be that honest we might see some little glim-

mer of the image of God in the other that we've never seen before. If we do, then it's only because we recognize that same image in ourselves. If we don't, then something other than God's spirit is probably guiding us.

God can most clearly be seen in those called together in relationship. We have known that on many levels. So, we who feel called together in God's name can offer something of what we have found by sharing what we have experienced with other. Wherever we find ourselves, and whatever condition of life we are in, we are all members of a sacramental family through whose life God's love can be made known to the world. That is a blessing unlike any other. It is one we can give.

Can that help heal a nation? I don't know, but it might work toward our own healing. That's as good a place to start as any, and it has to start somewhere. If we can be involved in such a blessing then we might be in a position to bless others, even those with whom we disagree. A nation whose people are so blessed would find it hard to tear itself asunder.