



The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (A)
July 5, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

In a recent interview with Dr. Eddie Glaude, Jr., Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, Glaude talked about the “capacity of human beings to be better”. He spoke those words when speaking of the novelist, playwright, poet and social activist, James Baldwin. (MCNBC 06.29.20) He talked about the legacy of Baldwin and how immediate that legacy is for us today. Human beings have the capacity to be better. I was so moved when I heard those words that I immediately went to my laptop to write them down.

The interview with Glaude was recorded on the heels of the State of Mississippi having passed the bill to remove the Confederate flag as part of the Mississippi flag. That was a bold and dramatic move. Was it not a move in keeping with the goal to move human beings to be better? In some ways, the passage of the bill was and is a sign that the ‘Old South’ is moving from the dark things of its past toward a better way of life for all people, especially our People of Color.

As one who grew up in the South, I experienced some of the ‘dark things’ that characterize racism, segregation and white privilege. It seems to me that Mississippi and the nation are trying to move from the ‘dark things’ of racial injustice toward the light of truth and justice. That truth is conveyed through teaching, learning and embracing wisdom.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of wisdom in his attempt to teach those who would listen and hear. Jesus took the opportunities in which he found himself to teach others his way of love, his way of living, his way “to be better”. We believe that Jesus was a model of what it means to treat all people with dignity and respect, as we are all God’s creatures.

Are we not called “to be better” in how we live, move and have our being? Are we not called “to be better” and to more fully realize the “capacity of human beings to be better”? How do we live into the wisdom of Jesus in ways that enable all our sisters and brothers to experience the love of God in and through everything we do and say?

A theologian recently wrote that “Wisdom clarifies our vision. When Jesus declares that wisdom is vindicated by her deeds, he is lifting up an important aspect of his Jewish heritage, the wisdom tradition. Wisdom grants us the ability to understand beyond our sensory perception...” Wisdom “provides order to chaos. (Proverbs 8:27–31), grants us humility (Psalm 11:12) and protects and guards us (Psalm 4:6)”. Godly wisdom “is full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). (Jennifer Kaalund, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4502)

Words from the above passage highlight fruits of wisdom and expand the gifts of the Holy Spirit: vision, perception, humility and mercy. Do we not long for those attributes, and are we not called to live “without partiality and without hypocrisy”?

The signs of the times in which we live are pointing us in directions perhaps like never before, and yes, the pains of growth are real and not comfortable. What are we being called to as followers of Jesus? How are we to find

wisdom and truth, and how are we to live as examples of that wisdom and truth in the world? As followers of Jesus, how are we to find a path that will enable us to embrace truth and to love one another?

I believe we are called to better understand one another and to be all God calls us to be. By the very nature of our Baptism, we are to be God's truth, justice, love and mercy in the world. In profound ways, Jesus demonstrated how to find that path, how to walk along that path and how to bear fruit in the process.

On both my deck and in my living room, I have statues of Buddha in a meditation position. I see Buddha still, calm and in deep reflection, quietly pondering life and how best to live it. The Buddhist Tradition teaches much about vision, perception, humility and mercy.

The Jesus Tradition teaches us much about how to see others as they desire to be seen and to better perceive the needs of others as they experience them. It teaches us to love others as we desire to be loved and as we are loved by God.

Both the Buddhist and Jesus Traditions teach humility and mercy: humility, so we can better relate to others in the world around us; mercy, so we can learn how to allow others to be who they are and not who we think they should be. Both Traditions challenge followers to let go of one's own agenda in order to embrace a way of life which is 'other' oriented. Jesus calls us to be 'other' oriented. Jesus calls us to walk with him and others on a path to "be better" and to be all who we are called to be as his followers.

Sometimes the path to life is right before us. On July 5, 1852, a former slave, Frederik Douglass, gave a profound speech entitled, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* Douglass spoke of the evils of slavery and how America and its institutions including the Church supported it. I commend the speech to you, a brilliant work of profound depth and challenge, and one as appropriate then as it is now. (<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>)

In today's Gospel, the path to life was standing before those Jesus encountered. I often wonder how those to whom he spoke reacted to the radical nature of his way of life and his words of wisdom for a new and better life.

Today, Jesus stands before us with arms and hands outstretched, beckoning us to new life. How will we respond? What will we need to do to embrace his 'way of life? What changes do you and I need to make in order to more fully embrace new life for us and all our sisters and brothers?

Our choices need to enable a better life for all people. With God's help, we can be catalysts of change so that *all* God's people can and will find a new and better way of life. Amen.