



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Sept. 8, 2019
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.

Today, we come together with joy and anticipation as we have embarked on what we call Celebration Sunday. Today, the Children's Formation program returns. The Youth Formation program returns. Our lovely choir returns with some fresh faces. Adult Formation has already returned with seventeen adults in yesterday's Inquirers' Class.

The Ministry Fair returns for the third year in a row following today's 10:30 Eucharist. The Fair highlights the over thirty volunteer opportunities offered at St. Mark's to serve God and God's people. Some ministries start up anew while others continued throughout the summer months. The Breakfast Café hasn't missed a beat and continues to serve our neighbors every Sunday of the year. Throughout the summer, worship on Sundays and Wednesdays continued, and I give thanks to all those who continue to make our worship rich and life-giving.

Some of us were able to retreat to cottages on lakes or make pilgrimages to visit family or friends. Others of us enjoyed 'staycations', an interesting word to be sure. Some of us worshipped here every Sunday while some of us worshipped in other places or perhaps worshipped God in the beauty of creation.

Today's Celebration Sunday isn't just a day which happens in a vacuum. It has been months in preparation. All the programs which resume and the liturgies which continue our tradition take serious foundation. Our life together is founded on the love of God in Jesus with passionate hearts and the energy of many people.

Your staff has worked all summer with vacation time here and there. Our new Director of Children's Formation has worked tirelessly over the past two months. Laura has gathered an amazing team of volunteers bringing a new founded energy which has been exciting. Property Ministry has accomplished multiple projects over the summer. Other ministries have continued meeting throughout the summer. The sick and the elderly have been visited, and the hum of ministry has continued.

Today, we get a booster shot as we have come to celebrate our life together, and yet we recognize that we do not live apart from the world. In many ways, we recognize that we are living in a world of extremes.

A world with escalating gun violence has propelled us to move forward with multiple meetings and workshops over the summer months. We are working hard to lay a foundation for a safety and security plan which will best serve us, especially our children. We have already put into motion greater security on Sundays and throughout the week. A copy of part of the agenda for last week's All Ministries Meeting on safety and security can be found on both Resource Tables.

A world with more intense hurricanes has just wreaked massive destruction in the Bahamas. The long history of Dorian occupied the news for several weeks, and some communities along our coast are breathing a sigh of relief while others are in clean-up mode.

Think about these things in contrast to a calm Lake Michigan on a summer's eve. Think about these things in contrast to warm and sunny days which call forth a slower pace in life. Think about these things against a backdrop of family celebrations over the summer.

As I thought about all these things and others, I was captivated by the words from the Book of Deuteronomy attributed to Moses. Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Hebrew Scriptures, is a kind of farewell address by Moses to the Israelites. The wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt will come to an end, and Moses will never see the Promised Land. His words are words of stark contrast: “I have set before you today, life and prosperity, death and adversity”.

Each of us experiences life and will experience death. Each of us experiences times of prosperity and times of adversity. Moses positions this language of stark contrast within a greater context, and that context is being faithful to God who was faithful to the Israelites.

The language of Jesus in today’s Gospel is arresting if not hauntingly stark. That language challenges us with a contrast that should give us pause. Part of that language tells us without question that “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”. Jesus does not mince words. Moses did not mince words.

Sometimes, the truth is not easy to hear. Too often these days, the world in which we live seems more comfortable with not hearing the truth. Scripture passages bear truth. They are a proclamation of the truth for us who strive to live within the Judeo-Christian Tradition in which we find ourselves.

Sunday after Sunday, we hear four passages from the Bible, two of which most often come from the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures are foundational to the Christian Scriptures, and the first reading and the Gospel are linked every Sunday of the year.

Today, we come together on this Celebration Sunday to continue laying a foundation as Christians which will enable us to live as Jesus would have us live. We seek to live not in a world of ambivalence but in a world with as much certainty as possible. The contrasts in life need a rock solid foundation of as much certainty as possible. The Christian Tradition can give us certainty. How, we might ask?

Jesus, the love of God, came into the world that we might have life. The Spirit of God we celebrate during the Season of Pentecost continues to breathe life in to all we do and all we say. That breath is continuous and holds the fabric of our life together. It gives us the assurance that the foundation of our faith in Jesus is life-giving even in times of adversity. What can you do this fall to breathe in God’s breath of life? How might you best respond to God’s grace as it is expressed here at St. Mark’s?

Are we not here in response to God’s grace and to celebrate life and prosperity in Jesus? I believe we gather to celebrate the many opportunities for grace here at St. Mark’s. I encourage all of us to be committed to our life together, to get involved and to participate as often as possible in worship and other activities.

Extend yourself for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of others. Lay a foundation of commitment to God and St. Mark’s which will sustain you in life.

Gathered together in unity around Word, Sacrament and one another, we can experience life and great joy. Through the power of the Spirit, God’s life-sustaining grace is ours, for which we are most grateful. Amen.