

Bethel Anglican Church

St. Johns Street

St. Johns, Antigua

The Sixth Sunday after

the Epiphany (A)

February 16, 2020

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

**“How do we make the most of the rest of
our life?”**

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 5:21-37

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was
said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not

murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand

you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body

to go into hell. It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you

cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.”

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

(NRSV) And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.

Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to

human inclinations? For when one says, “I belong to Paul”, and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, Dear Lord.

Amen.

In the Alpha Bible study series one of the last and probably most meaningful presentations is entitled, “How Do I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?” “How Do I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?” It is a question that actually never gets definitively answered in our lifetime as we are all “People of the Way” as Dwight Zscheile writes of us Episcopalians in his

book by that title; and of course, all Christians are, biblically at least, People of the Way, People following the Way of Jesus Christ. In fact, we Christians were first called “people of the way” even before the word “Christian” was coined in Antioch, Syria. We have a leader; but we, none of us, are that leader; Christ has led the way through life, through death, and to eternity. And we are on the Way of Jesus Christ all the days of our life. So, our task is to remain on the Way, the Roadway, on the Highway, on the pathway of Christ as long as we live and move and have our being, as St. Paul puts it (Acts 17:28).

I once heard a Bishop say: “One of the unintended mistakes the church has made over the centuries is to convey that the only ones who are sent are those who are ordained. Which would mean that the rest of us are off the hook. Not so. Moses gathered 70 and sent them. Jesus gathered 70 and sent them. Paul gathered legions of people and sent them. On the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave people utterance – and sent them out. Not one of them was ordained. God wants to use us – as we are. Every one of us.”

And here we are being called to follow Christ the Saviour no matter what. It is our

life as Christians; it is our way as followers of Jesus on his way; it is the only way to life and salvation. We are, no matter what we think or what we feel, we are “on the way,” on the way to eternally be with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Eventually of course all our bodies will end up as dust or ashes or as part of a tree or whatever, but our very essence, our “psuke” as the Greeks called it, our “psyche” or our “everlastin’ soul”, that spiritual part of us lives on forever. We cannot be ended eternally by anything, not by cancer, not by an accident, not by a heart attack, not by a diabetic coma, not by Alzheimer’s, not by a snake bite or some

other violent act, we are indelible writing instruments in the hand of God who can never be erased. And our lives are writing the rest of the words of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, as we live and move and breathe and have our being.

We are what most of the world, most all of the world, all that the world will know of Jesus the Christ. Most will not ever read the Bible or even hear a sermon; they will not be present next Sunday or any Sunday at any church; instead they will be at a shopping mall today probably, or at a ski resort, or in front of a television set, or maybe they have escaped to a cool clime somewhere. But

even there we would be all most people there would ever see of Jesus. I wonder what they thought of our Gospel? I wonder what anyone thought of our Gospel this past week, the Gospel we were writing with our own day to day lives?

So if we were not certain that we represented all there was of the Good News of Jesus Christ, let me be entirely clear, probably no one else was carrying that torch of the love of Christ but us. Maybe someone else was a Christian in disguise, but we church goers are just about all anyone 'out there' will ever know about Jesus Christ, and without us, all, everyone is

in peril of eternal damnation, a very strong word to use in an Episcopal Church, I know, but we here were about the only person between someone, between many, between most in fact, we were the only person between them and an eternity without God, an eternity which will never experience the exhilaration of being with God the Father and his Son Jesus the Logos, Jesus the Word of God. Makes you think, doesn't it; what did those people out there really see in us? What did all those outside this church see? Did they see Jesus? Will they see Jesus this week, and what about next week?

So we have an enormous responsibility to show people ‘out there’ what the Way of Jesus looks like, and maybe attract at least a few to review the eternal meaning of their lives.

In a recent Harris poll

[http://webcenters.netscape.compuserve.com/
whatsnew/package.jsp?name=fte/harrispollo
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nreligion/harrispollonreligion)

entitled: “WHO Doesn't Believe in God?”
just over a quarter of U.S. adults say they do not believe in God.

While that does mean a strong majority--74 percent--do believe in God's existence, that number is down quite a bit from the 82

percent who believed in God in 2005, according to that Harris Poll.

In fact, in almost all areas of religious beliefs, fewer people now say they believe than in 2005. For example, how many now believe in:

- Miracles: 72 percent, down from 75 percent in 2005
- Heaven: 68 percent, down from 75 percent
- How many now believe Jesus is God or Jesus is the Son of God: 68 percent, a little over two-thirds, down from 72 percent;
- What about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: 65 percent, down from 70 percent;

- And as for survival of the soul after death: 64 percent, less than two-thirds now, down from 69 percent;
- Belief in the devil: 58 percent, down from 62 percent;
- Belief in Hell: 58 percent, down from 62 percent, right in parallel with the devil.
- Belief in the Virgin birth: 57 percent, down from 60 percent

So what else is commonly believed in?

- Darwin's theory of evolution: 47 percent (less than half believe in evolution!)
- Ghosts: 42 percent believe in ghosts.

- UFOs: 36 percent – more than one-third in the U.S. believe in UFO's!
- Creationism: 36 percent, more than a third!
- Astrology: 29 percent, growing in popularity!
- Witches: 26 percent; there are more registered witches and wickens in the United Kingdom than Anglican clergy!
- Reincarnation: 24 percent, the Hindus are gaining!

Believing with an absolute certainty that there is a God is also down. Some 68 percent of U.S. adults say they are either absolutely certain or somewhat certain there

is a God, compared with the 79 percent who professed the same certainty in 2003. God has lost credibility on average one percentage point a year! Belief in God has not fared nearly as well as the Dow Jones Average! Barely two-thirds of people in the U.S. believe in God now!

And now who claims they are religious?

- Very religious: 19 percent
- Somewhat religious: 40 percent
- Not at all religious: 23 percent

Only 59 percent are at least somewhat religious!

(--From the Editors at Netscape)

We Christians indeed have our jobs cut out for us!

In an essay entitled, “A Job versus A Ministry,” Pastor Mickey Anders writes:

“Someone has said there is a huge difference between having a job at church and having a ministry at church.

... If you are doing it because no one else will, it's a job. If you are doing it to serve the Lord, it's a ministry.

... If you're doing it just well enough to get by, it's a job. If you're doing it to the best of your ability, it's a ministry.

... If you'll do it only as long as it doesn't interfere with your other activities, it's a job.

If you're committed to staying with it even when it means letting go of other things, it's a ministry.

... It's hard to get excited about a job. It's almost impossible not to get excited about a ministry. An average church is filled with people doing jobs. A great church is filled with people involved in ministry.”

[Mickey Anders, The Beginning of Ministry]

The Reverend King Duncan writes in “A Problem of Presentation”:

“Jesus came preaching that ‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ What was there about

that kingdom that got these fishermen so excited? And why are we not just as excited? Maybe we don't understand what the kingdom is. Or maybe it just hasn't been presented very well.

Reverend Duncan continues: “It reminds me of a woman who read somewhere that dogs were healthier if fed a tablespoon of cod liver oil each day. So, each day she followed the same routine. She chased her dog until she caught it, wrestled it down, and managed to force the fishy remedy down the dog's throat.

“Until one day when, in the middle of this grueling medical effort, the bottle was

kicked over. With a sigh, she loosed her grip on the dog so she could wipe up the mess. To her surprise the dog trotted over to the puddle and begin lapping up what had been spilled. THE DOG LOVED COD LIVER OIL! It was just the owner's method of application the dog objected to.

Duncan concludes: “Sometimes I think something like that has happened to the good news of the Kingdom of God. It has been so poorly presented to us that we have never been captured by its attractiveness and its power.”

[King Duncan, Collected Sermons,
www.Sermons.com]

William B. Kincaid, III, wrote in an essay entitled, “Essential Personnel”:

“Even if we live where it rarely snows, the phrase, ‘essential personnel,’ is a familiar one. When budget talks collapse and the government shuts down, this is the phrase that is trotted out, ‘essential personnel.’

When the earth suddenly moves under the people of California, often a certain group of people are called out while the rest are told to stay at home. When tornadoes blow through the Southwest and disrupt everything in their course, only certain people should risk the dangers involved.

These are maintenance people, road crews, ambulance drivers, fire fighters, electric and gas company workers, truck drivers, and a whole host of service people who are taken for granted when things are running smoothly. We call them, ‘essential personnel.’

William Kincaid continues, “Think about that phrase. Think about what it means to be ‘essential personnel.’ Then, if you want to be humbled, think about what it is like to be non-essential personnel. Consider the fact that the world can go on without some of us. The good news is that in the church we are all, or at least all can be, all of us can be,

‘essential personnel.’ We are called to be a special group of people and to do some very important, life saving, things.”

[William B. Kincaid, III, *And Then Came The Angel*, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.]

James L. Killen, Jr., in his treatise, “From Expectancy to Remembrance, Christians under Construction,” Killen notes: “People print all sorts of things on T-shirts, from advertisements to obscenities to affirmations of faith. One fellow was seen wearing a T-shirt with the words, ‘Christian Under Construction,’ printed on it. We can all appreciate what he meant by that. We can

talk about the difference faith in Christ is supposed to make in our lives and about how it is supposed to work and even about the samples of the new life in Christ that we have already experienced. But, most of us know that we are not yet what God wants us to be. At our best, we are Christians under construction. And, that is all right. That is a good way to be. The changes that God will make in our lives don't happen all at once. It is a good thing to know that we are in the process of becoming what God wants to make us and to participate in that process very intentionally and joyfully.

“In our Epistle lesson for today, Paul reckons with the fact that the Christians at Corinth, to whom he is writing, are still ‘Christians under construction.’ He has been talking about new life in the Spirit and about the Spirit interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Then he comes down to earth and says, ‘But, you folks obviously aren't there yet. If you were, you wouldn't be arguing about petty little things like which pastor you like best.’ St. Paul says, ‘I could not talk to you as spiritual people. I must speak to you as people who are still in the flesh, as infants in Christ.’ Paul seems impatient at this and is

disappointed in the Corinthians. But eventually Paul came to understand that this is just part of the process, something that has to be worked with,” that we all are in some growth process with the way of Jesus Christ.

[James L. Killen, Jr., From Expectancy to Remembrance, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.]

Our lives are living proof that Jesus rose from the dead, that he sits on God’s right hand in heaven, and that on the last day he will come to judge the good and the bad, the saved and the unsaved. The latter, the unsaved, the unsaved have no one else this week to save them. Let us walk the walk of

Christ and give them a chance at eternal life
this week and for the rest of their lives and
our lives.

Amen.

Description – We are people on a journey to come closer to God’s will for us. Our lives are the Gospel, sometimes the only Good News others will ever hear or see. Pray for Christ to help us bring other closer to him.

Tags – God, Christ, Jesus, gospel, Episcopal, belief, construction, essential, personnel, firefighters, police, EMS, religious, cod, liver, dog, Alpha, bible, jobs, ministry