

All Saints Steenrijk Episcopal Church

Willemstad, Curacao

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Memorial for the Burial of the Dead

September 24, 2022

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Jesus First, Others Second, Yourselves

Last”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

according to John 14:1-6

Jesus said, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many

dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

“Jesus First, Others Second, Yourself Last”

Dear God, may our hearts be turned to you always, remembering others, and not forgetting our own needs, we pray. Amen.

Jesus first, Others next, and Yourself last, and its mnemonic that forms the word, J-O-Y; J-O-Y: Jesus first, Others next, and Yourself last.

Kermit the Frog had a saying, “It’s not easy being green.” And today, we must modify Kermit a bit to say, “It’s not easy to be the Queen.”

I have had tea more than once with the Queen in her Buckingham Palace Gardens in London, ...LOL...with about a thousand others, mostly Anglican Bishops at the Lambeth Conferences that are held in England approximately every ten or so years.

We were regimented standing in rows about six or more deep as the Queen and her Consort made their way around to greet all of us, and for a precious few to have a brief chat with her. We were in about row four from the front the first time in 1997; and as I learned the 'lay of the land', we worked ourselves up to Row Two in 2007, nearly

getting to shake her hand, but not quite. The one time we heard her voice she exclaimed, “Pakistan” as one Bishop introduced himself as being one of the four Anglican Bishops from Pakistan. And in 2007 we positioned our friend in front of us, in the first row, our friend, the Suffragan Bishop of New Guinea, who was wearing a brown ‘bush hat’ that he used as he penetrated the depths of New Guinea to get to his churches by a several hour journey on foot after the last road ended.

Fortunately. he had a nice long conversation with the Queen and was very pleased to be able to do that.

The royalty of England is held in awe by most Britons, and even in the United States not so long ago, about ten percent surveyed said they would prefer a King instead of a President.

But as today's scripture says, in the Lord's house are many mansions, or many rooms. Will the Queen inhabit a mansion or a room, we will never know on this side of heaven, and maybe not on the other side as well.

But in many ways, much of the world is suffering from dire poverty, and seeing the vast wealth of royalty, many wonder if the Lord is in any way pleased with such a gap.

Of course. we Christians say there is only one King who is God sitting on one throne, God's throne. All others must bow and offer the greatest honor to God our Father.

My friend from the Sudan is raising money to buy school chairs for the many impoverished children in the Sudan. I was with him yesterday as he made a recorded plea for the children of the Sudan. He himself had never seen a chair until he was thirteen years old. So can you imagine what such a child would think of a throne? One throne would likely provide for chairs for over a thousand little children who

otherwise must sit on the ground for everything, eating, school, and so on.

And when we look at all we have, what we own would probably secure food for a whole village for at least a year or much longer.

The word, “redemption” comes to mind here. How do we justify what we have in the midst of a world of dire poverty? How do we redeem ourselves?

One of my medical school classmates from Morocco said she got hookworms from sitting on the ground when she was a little girl, and the villagers made fun of her itching. She had no chair to sit in.

So how possibly can we redeem ourselves from our wealth? The Queen's problem is actually our problem.

It's not easy to be the Queen, and it is not easy to have the wealth we all have.

The world today is besieged by millions of refugees, many forced out of their homes by war and bandits. Many looking for some better way of life.

As my friend from the Sudan said, "It is not chairs that the people search for, it food and water." Chairs are a luxury.

Several months ago I suggested we here at All Saints Steenrijk set up a food program, asking people to bring in food cans

each Sunday. So far we have not made any progress. Let us recommit ourselves to serving the last, the least, and the lonely.

So many grocery stores and restaurants throw out good food every day. The food could be made available for the poor instead. One of our members here who is a teacher confided that his students say to him, “Teacher, our stomachs are empty.” How can a student study properly with an empty stomach? What will we do about that?

So many diseases in the world can be prevented by a few pennies a day.

Today we honor the Queen because she held the course; she kept her faith to the end.

But her belongings were there to the end as well. How will they be distributed?

Wealth, however large or small will only be with us for this lifetime. How will eternity look upon us who have... but do not give?

In our former church home, St. John's, back in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where I was a Rector for 24 years--early in my ministry there we put the baptismal font up in front of the church instead of way back in the rear of the church. It was a controversial move, one which caused one family to leave the church. But everyone else weathered the change. In time we learned that that ancient

baptismal font dating from the late eighteenth century had been donated by a former Tory who had lost everything when Britain lost the United States Revolutionary War. His wealth had been upheld as long as the British were ‘in charge’. But a spiritual moment led him back to England where he became an ordained Anglican priest, and he returned to our church to become a missionary pastor in the colonies. But he made a gift of that baptismal font to the church in honor of how much his faith meant to him—no grudges, no anger, just a way to say that God’s way was the best way for his life. And our church became a

beacon for the last, the least, and the lonely. It is a refugee haven now, serving many refugees from South and Central America. And they always serve a free lunch to over a hundred every Sunday. They have learned that to do without food and water is not a particularly good way of living; and they have gotten five other churches to help them in this mighty effort.

In one service I led in a large church in the middle of Manhattan, a homeless man said he was homeless because his father, a preacher, gave all of the family's belongings to the poor--er. So there is need to consider our own families. They surely come first.

And we are as important as well. But how we use what we have is a decision we make today for all eternity.

What will we do with what we have?

Amen.

Jesus First, Others Second, Yourselfes Last

Description: Everything we have comes from God. How are we using our wealth today to serve the last, the least, and the lonely?

Tags: Jesus, God, family, friends, wealth, chairs, poverty, Queen, throne, feeding, baptismal, font, Sudan