

St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 25th after Pentecost
November 14, 2010

Malachi 4:1-2a, Psalm 98
2Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19

With all the preaching talent in this parish nowadays I have to campaign, advocate and bribe just to get a gig. So Chris finally gives me a date, probably just to get me out of her office. Then her printer hums, and out comes the lectionary for today. I say thank you and walk out into the hall to read it. Psalm 98, *sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things*, cool, I can preach that. The Epistle, *anyone unwilling to work should not eat*, okay, whatever. Then comes the Gospel for today. Oh God Lord. And I asked for this? Why, I oughta have my head examined.

To sum up . . . in Christ's name you will be ostracized, separated from your family, hated, put in jail and maybe even put to death. That's the cost of following Jesus. Have a nice day.

Sooner or later we all have to come to terms with the costs of discipleship. And, no, this isn't a stewardship sermon, but it could be. Let's start with the last sentence and work backwards. "*By your endurance you will gain your souls.*" Well, that's good news. Gotta love that. It's all that other stuff that doesn't sound so appealing. I'm wondering how many of us will ever be put to that kind of test. I don't know if I would pass it. I doubt I have whatever Thomas Moore, or Oscar Romero, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer had. And I agree with Sister Joan Chittester when she says, *there has to be an easier way to get into heaven.*

But perhaps I'm overthinking it. Life is series of small moments. If your life is completely messed up, it's probably not because of one bad decision. So it's the little choices, the little actions, that make up our lives. Not so dramatic, not the stuff of movies. Maybe I can't do the big things. But I love the saying: *Don't let what you can't do stop you from doing what you can do.* I come to church every Sunday, I work in the ministries I'm called to. I tell the truth. I do those things that make me uncomfortable: like not allowing a joke at someone's expense to go unchallenged, or standing up for someone who's being marginalized. I wash feet on Maundy

Thursday, or carry the cross through the neighborhood on Good Friday. I show up to serve the Community Meals even when I don't much feel like being sociable. These things I can do.

I know many of you are cradle Christians, but I am not. Right after I was baptized here in 2001, I had trouble just with the question "*are you a Christian?*" I spent most of my life anti-Christian. I didn't really know anything about Christ, but I thought I knew something about Christianity. Then I start seeking and I have this amazing experience of Christ's presence and become part of this church. Still, when someone asked if I was Christian, I would say something brilliant like "kinda."

Let me share a story about what it's like to be a Christian in my family. In 2000, I was trying to recover from a series of relapses into my addictions that cost me nearly everything. I had coffee with my brother, who kept pointing his index finger at me and saying, "*you have to do whatever it takes to stay sober. You hear me?, whatever it takes.*" He must have said it twelve times. When I called him up three weeks later to tell him I had been church shopping and had found St. Michael's, he said, "*Well not that!*" My family still thinks I'm crazy, but at least they let me say grace at Thanksgiving.

Even now, when someone asks me if I'm a Christian, my mind goes to the two or three paragraphs I've rehearsed well, that distance myself from the fundamentalist wing of the faith, from the prosperity theologies, from the exclusionary denominations and the guys on TV. But the answer to the question is simply, "*yes, yes I am.*" Of course what's really important isn't what I say, it's what I do. In the saying attributed to St. Francis, "*Preach the Gospel, and if you must, speak.*"

We might be the only Bible someone ever reads. So we live our lives with the joy and gratitude that goes along with having been redeemed by Christ, and people will naturally be attracted to us. Then, when asked, we could talk about our faith. I don't know about you, but I tend to lead by talking about this church, this community, this perfectly imperfect household of faith. I've been told my eyes light up when I do that, and my enthusiasm is apparent. There are at least a couple of people in our congregation that are here because of that. They wouldn't be here if I didn't say, like my namesake Philip, "*Come and see.*"

In the rite of Baptism, we say as a community, *We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim His resurrection, and share with us in His eternal priesthood.* Do we confess the faith? How do we do that? The Baptismal certificate says, among other things, you are a minister of the church. In the closing prayer of this service we ask God to be His people in the world. To proclaim in ALL we say and do, the good news in Christ Jesus. *In all we say and do?* Some mornings I can't be a good Christian all the way to church.

So how do we do that? Okay, we're Episcopalians, so street corner preaching is right out. That's not effective anyway. No soapboxes, but how do we live our life in Christ out loud? I suppose the answer would be to ask ourselves what would Jesus do, and act accordingly. The problem for me is that most of the time I have no idea what Jesus would do. But I have a pretty good idea what He wouldn't do. I can't find one scripture reference to Jesus pouting because He didn't get His way. He wouldn't judge people, or turn them away, or say I can't be bothered, or cut them off in traffic, or stay home to watch the World Series when he should have been at Evening Prayer.

But let's go back to that last sentence again: "*By your endurance you will gain your souls.*" What if endurance means the faith to keep praying even when you don't feel any connection to God whatsoever? What if it means the tenacity to keep showing up even on those days when you don't want to? What if it meant to just do the next right thing, and then the next right thing after that? What if endurance meant trying to live so that, like the hymn says, they will know we are Christians by our love?

During communion in this church we take action. We get up, we come forward toward the cross, and we put our hands out – saying with our movements yes, please, I want to be included in the body of Christ. We leave this table re-marked, as it were, as Christ's own, we go out from here to love and serve the lord. We share our time, and our talent, and our money in that endeavor. I believe the most valuable thing we have to share is our story and our faith.

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– Phillip Blomberg