

A Sermon for 10th Sunday after Pentecost

July 28, 2024



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Click Here for today's Readings:
[Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

2 Samuel 11:1-15, Luke 10:38-42, John 6:1-21

Faith in Abundance

Wow! This is a big weekend – the Olympics just began, hot air balloons are rising for the Hall of Fame weekend, Norm and I have celebrations of our own, the Giffins are celebrating birthdays and their wedding anniversary, and the Episcopal Church is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women. And there are scripture references for all of it. The Gospel of John talks about the wonderful abundance of God, when Jesus hand-feeds 5,000 people and his disciples gather up 12 baskets of leftovers, from what started out as five loaves of bread and two fish. Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

There is a quieter Gospel reading, from Luke, that I would like to mention. It has meant a lot to me over the last 28 years. It speaks of a small dinner party at the home of Mary and Martha. Jesus and his disciples enter the sisters' home in Bethany. Martha knocks herself out in the kitchen while Mary sits at Jesus' feet and learns along with the men. This always seems to me to be about two sides of women's work: the expected activity to feed and serve everyone, and the more contemplative service of listening and learning. This is the Gospel for Monday, July 29, the feast day of Mary and Martha.

When I was ordained on July 29 in 1996, I knew about Mary and Martha, but I did not realize it was the same anniversary date for eleven courageous women, who went up against the power structure of our church and were ordained priests in 1974. The Philadelphia Eleven, as they are known, were well qualified for ordination. The Episcopal Church had not approved the ordination of women yet, and these eleven women were tired of waiting for the ecclesiastic bureaucracy to move forward, and so they were ordained anyway, without official approval. It was a tough battle for acceptance, and these early women priests remain heroes to us to this day, shaking up a beautiful, traditional and rather sexist Episcopal church to become the reflection of all God's people. I feel I have more in common with them than just the date, July 29.

Fighting for God-given rights is often difficult for women. Our Old Testament reading today is a terrible example. We have been following the story of King David, who apparently thought he could do whatever he wanted to satisfy his own desire. This is the famous story of David and Bathsheba, a 3000-year old example of the “Me Too” enigma. We hear the story mostly from David’s point of view – that he saw a lovely woman taking a bath, ordered her to come to him, and they had sex. We don’t know if Bathsheba consented to the act – her opinion is not recorded, but what do you think? Could she really have said “no” to the king? The story goes on, getting worse and worse: King David tries to cover up the evidence. Bathsheba is pregnant, and David attempts to blame the pregnancy on Bathsheba’s husband Uriah, but Uriah is too honorable and refuses to sleep with his wife. So King David orders Uriah into the line of fire in the ongoing war, and Uriah is killed. We will hear God’s judgment on this betrayal next week. This is a famous example of a woman being used as a pawn by a powerful man. How do you say “no” to a king? And for the Philadelphia Eleven, how do you stand up to power, when the authority insists God is male, Jesus was male, therefore you silly women can’t be priests. Hm, I beg to differ. And I congratulate this congregation, which has welcomed women priests for over 25 years, ever since the merger of the two parishes, which was engineered by a woman, Rev. Stephanie Pace.

I can only imagine how frightened all these women were, from Bathsheba, to Mary and Martha, to the Philadelphia Eleven. As we the church attempt to work our way through change, it always takes courage and faith. Some things seem impossible or miraculous, like Jesus feeding 5000 people with so little food, but God’s surprising abundance feeds us all. At the end of the Gospel story comes the voice of assurance. The disciples are in a boat, as they often are, and Jesus comes towards them, walking on the water, and they are terrified. But he says to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

These are truly words of assurance for us all, no matter what we are going through. We go forward in faith, with courage, and we are not afraid, because we know that Jesus is with us.

Benediction*

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short,

Grace to risk something big for something good,

Grace to remember that the world is now

too dangerous for anything but truth

and too small for anything but love.

So may God take our minds and think through them,

May God take our lips and speak through them,

May God take our hearts and set them on fire

With God's goodness, love and truth. Amen. (*author unknown)