St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Proper 16

[1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp16_RCL.html#ot1)[Psalm 84](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp16_RCL.html#ps1)[Ephesians 6:10-20](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp16_RCL.html#nt1)[John 6:56-69](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp16_RCL.html#gsp1)

Shield of Faith

There is a pub at the end of my street, and if I’m seeming a little sleepy today, it’s because for the last two nights my sleep has been disturbed by loud voices in the street in front of my bedroom at closing time and beyond. The voices are either loudly laughing, oblivious of the hour or even more loudly profane as screaming arguments and drunken quarrels about who done who wrong continue, with much car door slamming and threats to do all manner of nasty things to whomever at some time in the future. I have been tempted to put on my collar, and go down to congratulate them for being first to arrive for morning prayer, but sense this would not be a good idea, and probably not too welcome an invitation. Besides, I want to live to see Sunday morning, too. But I can’t help thinking, that if these people were spending just a small amount of time thinking of about giving a few thanks for being alive in God’s creative world, they might be less inclined to allow such anger and thoughtlessness to lead them to turn on each other with such an ugly show control and strength. I’m not sure if Charles Dickens would have thought of this time we are in is the best of times, meaning a time when we find the best of ourselves, or the worst of times, when we fall into dependence on the worst of ourselves.

Whichever it is, however, we do know that if ever there was a time to put on the breastplate of faith, now is the time. We are beset by forces, cosmic and worldly, that seem determined to undermine our patience. The forces, largely beyond our current control, have the power to create doubt in our minds and hearts about our purpose in life, determining for us how, when or where we must best fit in, and with unwithering determination, seem to be willing us to turn to other worldly gods to find some problematic sources of happiness. The resulting chaos can leave us frustrated and confused, and often leaves us to resort to anger and blame.

We are not the first to be facing these other worldly gods. Our ancestors have all come to face the same enemies of the one true God. We could call them the tempter gods. The gods of the flesh, which when faced with them, we can be so very weak.

We turn to whatever it is that will make us feel effortlessly better in the face of the world’s continual battering of pandemic, natural disaster and the cruelty of war. We turn to quick entertainment, food and flights of fancy, trends and tips on how to cope with, or simply forget it all.

Midway through this current pandemic, we e turned to dogs to keep us company during lockdown, thinking that dogs, somehow, would make all the problems fade away, and now that we are experiencing a fraction of freedom, some 20% of those dogs are now being returned to shelters. But no matter what the panacea, at the end of the day, it’s all about us. It’s all a win for the false gods who tempt us. If you put it in Paul’s words, we are in the fight “against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

That’s some powerful force against which Paul calls us to fight. Paul knew, and we know that humankind’s lack of faith in the possibility of better days is at the root of much we face today. This is a truth that we need to acknowledge. It is humankind that creates upheaval in the streets and in the nations. It is humankind that builds itself up as the ultimate authority, the ultimate ruler and god of all.

One could say that the world has turned its back on the God the Creator, and God who so loved the world and God that sanctifies it.

We can’t help recalling the iconic words in Psalm 97: “For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is time, like never before, to hearken to His voice, even if we find ourselves in a lonely place in the hearing of it. We have no choice, as we are buffeted by so much to bear, but how, we ask ourselves, how are we to bear up. We who are suffering increasing anxiety in our hearts and minds instead of peace. We who are suffering depression as the beauty of the world become less and less apparent. We who are suffering anger at the world, instead of finding our way into it with security and curiosity.

How do we overcome the need to blame. Blaming each other, blaming someone who should know better, blaming anyone who thinks differently than we, or worse, looks and sounds differently that we.

If these are not influences brought about by false gods formed by and in the world in which we live, then we are at a loss to know from where they could come.

But we know the truth. As part of the faithful body of God, we we listen to Paul’s message as a call to faithful arms and we understand the words of Jesus today when he calls us to “take up our cross and follow.” We understand that Paul is giving us the “how to” instructions in order for us follow in Christs’s way, and Jesus teaches, “what will it profit (you) to gain the whole world and forfeit (your) life?”

Yes. It is easier said than done. The Cross is made heavy with its need to renounce the world and its accumulation of sin as the world falls deeper into evil. But it is the way of Christ and Jesus never said it would be easy.

God created a world of beauty, peace, and life and continually works to renew that life of beauty, continually works to cast out evil, and we are part of that work of renewal; that work of creation which lifts up peace, beauty and love of neighbor. It is ours to recognize, acknowledge and give thanks for all the opportunities for a blessed life. And, in giving thanks, we are to be about doing all we can to assist in helping the world to give thanks for this life, too. This seems like a tall order, but as Christians we are called to do just that, just as were the disciples from the very beginning.

We ask ourselves how we are to overcome such world wide disturbance. Jesus would say we start here. Today. Each in our own way. Each as part of this church of St. Aidan, so that this church can become a beacon of hope, possibility and faithful wisdom and love.

Each one of us is called today, individually, each in our own way and collectively bonded as Church, to face down and ultimately persevere over the evil influences, caused by pride, greed, blame, impatience and intolerance. They are old formulas long since proven as ineffective avenues to peaceful solutions to any problem. And thus, if we are to walk in the way of Christ toward peace and renewal, we must arm ourselves in a different way.

We do not build fences, we become shields against all of that in he world that would adulterate its very existence and our life in it. Jesus said, aware that his disciples were complaining about this divine covenant, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.”

It was too much for some of the disciples to take on, and some did leave Jesus and were disciples no more. They could not reach deep enough into themselves to find the kind of faith they needed in order to believe in the gifts God had given each of them to use in building up the world. So they went and were heard of no more.

But Peter, John, James, Mark, Matthew Paul, yes and Aidan and all the saints before them and after them, the saints of yesterday, today and those still to come who build up and do not tear down, stayed the course, armed with love.

They found and find their power in the whole armor of God so that they were and are able to stand fast against whatever it is that the world will fling against them. They find strength to face the truth about themselves and about the world. They are able to find the insight to recognize reality, their own reality and the reality of the world around them. They are righteous but do not judge. They create adjustments which allow them to walk in the way of peace and to have the courage to speak about why. It is with all of this that we can fight off all that besets us; that we can, as Paul suggests, “quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

We can pray for others: Oh, all those who war in the world, oh that you would hearken to the voice of God. If you must take up your shields, then may they be the shields of faith and peace. If you must take up your swords, then may they be the swords of the Spirit, “which is the Word of God.”

And, we can pray for ourselves: May our breastplates of faith, our shields of faith and our swords of the Spirit lead us to prayer and devotion, lamentation and supplication as we pray for ourselves, and for the healing of the world. May we be always alert to our own actions, to those moments when we can contribute solutions for peace and reconciliation rather than flame the fires of anger and blame.

Let us pray for the world and all that is in it. Pray that more will come to understand the cosmic forces for good, that more will deepen faith in the complexities of creation and the Creator self which made all things and is in all things.

Put on the full armor of God and feel the strength within and give thanks for the Creative renewal of God. Let us give thanks for the possibilities and hope that reigns eternal.

Let us live to speak boldly and with joy of a different kind. That which is born to constant awareness of God’s intent for us to continually renew ourselves each day. Not next month, next year, but in this very moment and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. To awaken to each new morning and to take on the armor of God is to live life fully, richly and to know that you are walking step by step, with complete faith in the Way of Jesus, slowly but surely moving all things to be made whole and new as you create with God a new world to come.

It is a noble task, whose end you may not live to see. But surely to live a life that contributes to the continuing development of God’s creation, we call life, in the fullest sense of the word, is to live a life worth living, not only for ourselves, but for the hope of a suffering world we hear too often, crying out in the night for answers, seeking only love and direction toward a God one can truly believe in.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

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1. Psalm 97:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)