

St. Michael's Episcopal Church
Epiphany 4a
Rev. Dr. Laura Blazek
“Lord, I will be an instrument of your peace”

There is a rather famous prayer that is attributed to St. Francis. Of all the prayers, he supposedly wrote, if you ask someone, “Do you know the St. Francis prayer?” They don’t respond, “Which one?” because in practically everyone’s mind that is familiar at all with St. Francis, there is only one prayer, THE prayer, and it begins, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” We will sing this prayer at the 11 o’clock service to music by our own organist Jon Roberts. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” It is a beautiful prayer.

At the diocesan convention last fall, the Bishop of Atlanta, Robert Wright, asked a valid question about this prayer, and about our way of praying in general. He asked, “How long will we ask God to make us do something? How long will we ask God to drag us kicking and screaming anywhere?” Instead, he says to pray, “I will. I will be an instrument of your peace...that’s my duty, that’s my privilege because of who you are to me Lord.” That has stuck with me. So much so that there is a Garfield the Cat Post-it note taped above my computer that on left says “It’s been Monday all week” as rain falls upon a prone Garfield, and on the right it says, “I will be an instrument of your peace.”

I will. These are powerful words of action. There is no room for “try” or “maybe”. It is a commitment. “I will.”

Put another way, using one of my favorite lines from Master Yoda in *Star Wars*, “Do or do not, there is no try.” This doesn’t mean you won’t fail. You will. We will. We are human and sinners, but God is there to forgive us and pick us up when we stumble.

I will. I will sow love wherever I go- the grocery store, the mall, in traffic, where I work- because small acts of kindness can result in big change.

I will pardon- when mistakes are made, when I am offended- because I will seek understanding. Defensiveness is a viscous circle that gets us nowhere. Bishop Wright contends that we need to “suspend our defensiveness and apply curiosity.” We need to listen to what others have to say. Without listening there can be no understanding. Without understanding there can be no pardon.

I will have faith in the message of love that is Christ and the path that He asks me to walk. The world tells me that this path is a foolish path that leads to death, but the path that leads to death is the path of believing in “mine” not “ours”, of believing in “I’m right and you’re wrong”, of trusting in no one but myself. I will have faith that the path Christ asks me to walk is one of wisdom and a life filled with gifts beyond measure.

I will hope because despair crushes us. The hope of Christ fills us, giving us the energy to go on. The hope of Christ radiates from us giving hope to others.

I will be a light in the darkness. Every day, I dread reading a paper or hearing the news because the darkness descends and spreads on a daily basis. In the midst of the spreading darkness, I will be a light because I will have hope; I will have faith; I will pardon, and I will sow love in my own little patch of the world.

I will spread joy in a hurting world. Joy is happiness. Happiness comes from living a life that is linked to the goodness of God so that we create heaven on Earth.

I will. Powerful words. We use them in our Baptismal covenant with God. When asked if we will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, we respond, I will. When asked if we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself, we respond, I will. When asked if we will strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being, we respond, I will. We make a commitment to Christ to be Christ in a broken and hurting world. We become Christ's hands and feet and eyes in the world.

What we do here, in this space, at this altar rail is important, but what we do out there, outside those doors, matters. There is a reason that the sign above the door that leads to the outside world says "Servants Entrance". If we walk out those doors and don't walk the walk and talk the talk, if we walk out those doors and don't love our neighbors as ourselves, if we walk out those doors and don't strive for justice to change the broken and sinful conditions that create human need. If we walk out those doors and do these things, then all of this is just an exercise. In our reading from Micah today we hear what is good and what the Lord requires of us. "...do justice...love kindness...walk humbly with your God."

And so I pray, Lord, I will be an instrument of your peace, because every day I wake up to news that our Christian nation is being everything but. We are building walls to keep out those not like us. We are turning away refugees fleeing in fear of their lives. We are denying the necessities of life- clean water and healthy food- to our citizens. We are denying healthcare to those in need. We are condemning other religions. We are destroying our planet in our own greed. We appear to care more about protecting our children from grizzlies than protecting them from ignorance. And the list goes on.

As the edicts continue to rain down from Washington D.C. it is easy to feel despair, to feel powerless, to become defensive and give in to doubt. Many years ago I read a book that looked at the role of the Church in anti-Semitism. It was a thick book, but what remains in my brain is the answer to the posed question about why God let the Holocaust happen. And the answer was, "Where were all the good Christians to stop it?"

Being a Christian isn't a passive exercise; it is an active, living, breathing way of being. We are called, as Paul puts it "...to shame the wise...and the strong." Christ didn't walk with the 1%. He walked among the 99%- the poor in spirit, the meek, the broken, the untouchables, the lost, the disenfranchised, the persecuted- he talked with them in person whether one on one or in large crowds and he blessed them. If we are called to be Christ in the world, can we do any less?

There is an adapted story about a man walking along a beach and throwing stranded starfish back into the sea. A passerby asks why he is doing this because he can't save them all. What

difference will it make? As the man throws a starfish back into the sea, he replies, “It made a difference to that one.”

Small, simple acts of kindness matter. Small, seemingly insignificant acts of standing up when others tell you to stand down, those matter. Saying, “I don’t agree with you, but please tell me more so I can understand.” That matters. Sowing love wherever you go, matters. Giving pardon, having faith and hope, being hope to someone else, matters. Spreading joy and being a light in the darkness, matters.

As you walk out of those doors this morning make this commitment- Lord, I will be an instrument of your peace.

Amen