

**Season after Pentecost Proper 8**  
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**2Corinthians 8:7-15**

As most of you know Mark changed his sermon last Sunday from what he was planning on preaching to talking about the terrible tragedy that had happened at the Bible Study in Charleston last Wednesday a week ago. Well it seems like the same thing has happened to me this week.

I was ready to preach on the Gospel reading today about healing, especially since this is Healing Sunday but some things came up this week for me and I now have also changed my mind about what I am preaching on. After listening to the Convention live feed this week I changed my mind and am now preaching about our second reading for today.

In 2Corinthians Chapter 8 Paul tells the people that he is happy that they have been generous with others. He tells them not to stop doing what they started last year but to keep giving and helping others because they desire to do it not because it is something he told them to do.

In the Message Bible Paul explains it a little simpler,

You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.

So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale. Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it. Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written,

Nothing left over to the one with the most,  
Nothing lacking to the one with the least.

This seems so simple when Paul says it but we all know how hard the road is that can lead to everyone being equal in each other's eyes, there is evil around us trying to keep us from having peace in our world as we saw last week take place in Charleston.

In our Forward Day by Day reading for Tuesday, June 23, the writer talks about how powerful evil is. He says we often don't feel equipped to stand against it. Our best chance at resistance can be found in community, a community that commits to being present in both the neighborhood and the world.

I don't know how many of you have been following what is happening at the Convention in Salt Lake City this week but I've been trying to keep up from day to day if I can. I listened to the opening Eucharist with Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori. She preached a very important and relevant sermon to the attendees about building a road in the desert while they are at the Convention and after listening to her I would like us also to start looking at building our roads in the desert that we live in so we reach out to our community and the world as equals and dispel the evil.

I would like to read a portion of Presiding Bishop Katherine's sermon so we can learn about building our roads.

She says,

We are grieving nine African-American Christians murdered while at Bible study. Women and girls are being raped and kidnapped as spoils of war in Central Africa. The Dominican Republic is expelling people of Haitian descent some of whose ancestors have been there for generations. Brazil has seen vicious attacks on Candomblé<sup>[5]</sup> communities recently. An 11 year old girl was stoned by militant Christians as she left a worship gathering last week, and a 90 year old priestess died of a heart attack when her worship space was invaded.<sup>[6]</sup>

We can help to build a different kind of road, one with light bearers rather than death dealers. The good news is there are forerunners at work in all the places of the world's conflict and hate – forerunners pointing to the Prince of Peace. Members of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston made their light-filled witness at the arraignment of the young man charged with shooting their fellow parishioners. They stood up and said, 'we forgive you, even in the midst of our nearly boundless pain; hate must not win.'<sup>[7]</sup> Their statements echoed the forgiveness offered by the Amish community whose daughters were slaughtered at school in 2006.<sup>[8]</sup> The Anglican Church in DR Congo is leading the work of healing and reintegrating women struck down in war.<sup>[9]</sup> In the Dominican Republic, Bishop Holguin and other religious and civic leaders are moving mountains to address the growing injustices meted out to people with darker skins.<sup>[10]</sup> In Porto Alegre, Brazil, an interreligious group of leaders stands in solidarity with all.<sup>[11]</sup>

We are gathered here to let our own light shine, to foster the work of peace everywhere, to stand in solidarity with people struggling to survive in the desert. On Sunday I met a group of young people in the Birmingham airport, who's T-shirts said "the Road." They were on a Methodist mission trip, coming to work somewhere in an Alabama desert. What Road gear will you put on for the way to the Reign of God?

This convention is about road-building in the desert. That kind of work that has always required teams of people, usually poor, often enslaved, sometimes a chosen vocation. Building a road home into the kingdom of God requires solidarity with those who are dragooned into construction work without compensation for their labor as well as those who cannot find a road. It's one reason Jesus called himself a road warrior, with no place to lay his head. There are many roles –you can join the chain gang, the litter crew, the Good Samaritan posse...

Our conversations about structure, mission, and marriage can prepare us for the journey, but they will not build the roadbed. They are a necessary prelude, a community-building exercise to get us focused and moving. The longer task is to build a road that will accommodate wheelchairs as easily as feet that will gather the little ones and the ancient ones together into an ever-increasing company taking the road for home. We're bound for a world without predators, with plentiful food and water for all, where all God's children are greeted with dignity reflecting their divine image, and the gifts of creation are shared and available to all, as each one has need.

We won't reach our journey's end unless we go together in company, in solidarity and partnership, trusting that God has provided what is needed – if we share the work and the gifts. That is the deepest meaning of forgiveness of our sins, which are always bound up with self-centeredness and selfishness. Remember that in the heat of debate! God has given us a variety of perspectives, and the body needs those gifts.

This road will be built by the bruised and broken, imperfect body of Christ. We're in transit in this world, on our way to the beloved community and the peaceable kingdom. Stony the road may be, it's built by blood, sweat, and tears, and bound together by the solidarity of countless feet, marching upward to Zion.

Follow Jesus into the neighborhoods. Travel light.<sup>1</sup>

As you can see from just a portion of her sermon how powerful it was. I believe we can build roads here at St Aidan's out to our neighborhoods in different ways beyond what we have been doing.

Another of the reasons my sermon took a turn after listening to Presiding Bishop Katherine's sermon was because, and I think it was a God thing, that I just happened to be reading at the time I heard her sermon, Brian McLaron's book, *We Make the Road by Walking, A year long quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation*. Each chapter is written to be read aloud in ten to twelve minutes, and is accompanied by a set of Scripture readings,

reflection/discussion questions, and liturgical resources so the book can be useful in a class or bible study group as well as for individuals on their own.

I haven't read very far into the book but I believe it is a book that can help us build our road into our community and the world. Once I finish the book I will look into a study on the book at St Aidan's so we can start to build a new road in our desert.

I would like to tell you a story that can help us get started.

This is the story of a student and her last project at the end of her term for Sociology, it was called, 'Smile.' The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions. She's a very friendly person and always smiles at everyone and says hello, so she thought this would be a piece of cake.

Soon after she was assigned the project, her and her husband, and youngest son went out to McDonald's one crisp March morning. It was just their way of sharing special playtime with their son. They were standing in line, waiting to be served, when all of a sudden everyone around them began to back away including her husband. She did not move an inch, while an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of her as she turned to see why they had moved.

As she turned around she smelled a horrible body odor and saw two poor homeless men standing behind her. As she looked at the short gentleman closest to her, he was 'smiling'. His beautiful sky blue eyes were full of hope as he searched for acceptance. He said, "Good day," as he counted the few coins he had been clutching. The second man fumbled with his hands as he stood behind his friend. She realized the second man was mentally challenged and the blue-eyed gentleman was his salvation.

She held her tears as she stood there with them. The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, "Coffee is all Miss," because that was all they could afford. After all, if they wanted to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something and they just wanted to be warm.

Then she really felt it, the compulsion was so great she almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes. That is when she noticed all eyes in the restaurant were set on her, judging her every action. She smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give her two more breakfast meals on a separate tray. She then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot.

She put the tray on the table and laid her hand on the blue-eyed gentleman's cold hand. He looked up at her, with tears in his eyes, and said, "Thank you." She leaned over and patted his hand. She started to cry as she walked away to join her husband and son. When she sat down her husband smiled at her and said, "That is why you are part of my life honey, to give me

hope." They held hands for a moment and at that time, they knew that because of the good fortune that they had been given was the reason they were able to give.<sup>2</sup>

The student and her family were building a road out in the desert; they were doing what Paul talked about in 2Corinthians. They were doing what Paul said in the Message Bible, "Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written,

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While the student walked over and acknowledged the men, reached down to touch and share a moment with them and give them something to eat the men gave her in return the warmth of a smile and a very special thank you.

Like Presiding Bishop Katherine said, "We won't reach our journey's end unless we go together in company, in solidarity and partnership, trusting that God has provided what is needed – if we share the work and the gifts.

This road will be built by the bruised and broken, imperfect body of Christ. We're in transit in this world, on our way to the beloved community and the peaceable kingdom. Stony the road may be, it's built by blood, sweat, and tears, and bound together by the solidarity of countless feet, marching upward to Zion.

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1. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/78th-general-convention-episcopal-church-june-25-sermon-presiding-bishop>

2. <http://www.kindspring.org/story/view.php?sid=9318>