

**Responding to Charlottesville**  
**What are we going to do at St. Aidan's?**

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Today's gospel contains two parts which, while seemingly different are completely connected. I had the option of asking Dana to read only the second half, but I asked her to read both parts. Why? Both sections are about purity and that was incredibly important to the Pharisees and to Jews in general who make up Matthew's audience.

Now remember purity and observing all the kosher laws was a primary focus of the Pharisees. Jesus is not telling them they are wrong, but that the emphasis is on the wrong thing. You can do all the ritually correct washings etc, but if what comes out of your mouth is what really defiles you. You can do everything right according to the bible but you can throw it all away by what you say and sometimes what you do not say. I again am conscious of Bonheoffer's words that I quoted last week. *Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.* So I come back to last weeks events in light of this week's gospel

So Jesus has just given the Pharisees something to think about and then he encounters a woman who is not Jewish. She was the other a Canaanite, the enemy. Now this passage is far more controversial than you may know. One camp feels that this is Jesus at his most human. He is caught off-guard in a moment of fatigue and calls the Canaanite woman a dog. I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel he tells her. Then she counters with, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs under the table. She calls him on his exclusion and then he turns and tells her "Great is your faith" and he heals her daughter.

Now that alternate is that he knew all along what he was doing and set up the disciples who wanted him to send her away. Then he turns the tables on them with her proclamation of faith. Now for today's purposes which interpretation you use is irrelevant. What is important is the message that everyone is a child of God. Everyone is made in the image and likeness of God and deserves love, respect and care.

Everyone is made in the image of God, that you cannot change. However we grow into the likeness of God by how we live our lives. That is an important concept that I learned from Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr<sup>1</sup>. Now in the kingdom everybody manages to be

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the image and likeness concept, go to Richard Rohr's mediation for August 20, 2017.  
<http://email.cac.org/t/ViewEmail/d/ACD422007D0CBB2F/BBC62F1EC1C6D196C68C6A341B5D209E>

both the image and likeness of God. That is what our Presiding Bishop refers to as the Beloved Community.

The Presiding Bishop said in a statement this week:

I know too well that talk of Beloved Community, which Jesus was describing when he spoke of the kingdom of God in our midst, can be dismissed as nice but naive, idealistic yet unrealistic. I know that. But I also know this. The way of Beloved Community is our only hope. In this most recent unveiling of hatred, bigotry, and cruelty, as Neo-Nazis marched and chanted, “The Jews will not replace us,” we have seen the alternative to God’s Beloved Community. And that alternative is simply unthinkable. It is nothing short of the nightmare of human self-destruction and the destruction of God’s creation. And that is unthinkable, too. We who follow Jesus have made a choice to walk a different way: the way of disciplined, intentional, passionate, compassionate, mobilized, organized love intent on creating God’s Beloved Community on earth.<sup>2</sup>

So where do we start. Well we made a start last week with those who stayed to join me in a dialogue. I wanted to have that dialogue before I stood here and preached. Then there are some suggestions in the resources that were attached to the Presiding Bishop’s statement.

Every week and for me every day I say the Confession of Sin: Things we have done and things we have not done. I for one had let myself get complacent. I thought we had got beyond this type of hateful speech and language. Now I feel myself called to get back to proclaiming the radical welcome and acceptance that Jesus taught.

Stephanie Spellers, a priest I served with in Massachusetts and now working for the National Church, wrote a book on Radical Welcome. Welcome comes in many forms. You are welcome at our church can be followed with one of several qualifiers. You are a sinner and we will fix you. And if you don’t want to change then you are going to hell. This has been especially painful to our LGBT brothers and sisters and a reason many have walked out the door.

Come join us and we will change you so you fit our idea of normal. This is the Star Trek Borg collective model of evangelism and what most welcoming churches really do. This is a challenge but it is far easier than truly radical welcome

Radical Welcome invites people to join us and enrich our congregation and our community. You are a unique child of God and have things to teach us. Very few churches really do this well.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2017/08/17/presiding-bishop-reflects-on-charlottesville-and-its-aftermath/>

The last is hard because it requires us to sometimes look into the mirror and realize that we might have some things that need to change.. We all struggle with seeing the divine in the other. That was one of the things I worked on while walking the Camino. Seeing the divine in everyone, even the people who annoyed the heck out of me! Seeing the divine in the young man who had walked out the door on the church as a teen because of the hate and exclusion that he had heard and now wanted nothing to do with the church. The divine was strong with this man, for he saw the hypocrisy of our modern day Pharisees that claim a message of love but only for those like them. Hell awaits everyone else.

Most of us operate out of a level of economic and racial privilege that is invisible no matter how hard we try. I learned some of this in seminary when we did our anti-racism training and sat with my classmates of color and learned what it was like for them growing up as a minority. I was clueless even though I had chosen to live for 22 years in a very integrated city.

Some of this lack of understanding was on display last week when a group of us stayed after the service for an hour of dialogue to try to process the horror of Charlottesville. We live in our little silos so most of us don't realize what it can be like out in the world for people of a different racial, religious or ethnic background. However there are members of our congregation who know what the issues are because they continue to experience them sometimes on a daily basis. Much has been made of the talk the African American parents have with their children especially their sons. Cathy Lewis had a program on that just before last weekend and I heard parents say they were afraid to let their children walk to a friend's house because they lived in a predominately white neighborhood and feared that a policeman might stop them and question them as not belonging there. I've seen that happen right here in Virginia Beach.

Someone remarked that we really do not get outside of this neighborhood. How can we change this they asked?

We made a start with our EYC going up on the Eastern Shore and engaging with the Hispanic ministry that the diocese has started. Now I don't know the details, but I know whom they were working with and I suspect those youth and adults who went there have a different view now.

I have a slightly unique view in that I have a window into the world of an impoverished African American community through Wendy's parish and their work with Enoch Baptist including their new community center. To help open our eyes to how God can work miracles and make changes I plan a pulpit exchange sometime this fall with Wendy where she can come and open your eyes the way her eyes have been opened. She can also bring you a message of hope because they have made progress in their neighborhood in improving relations between the police and the community. As a result Lake Edwards is no longer the highest crime area of the city. It can be done but it is only through working with the other and realizing that they are not other, but that they are our brothers and sisters.

I am making arrangements based on our discussion last week to invite Carrie from Seton to come and talk about the Mentoring Program that she runs and what we can do to engage and help those children, but also to open our eyes to a segment of the population we do not normally encounter.

No my friends we have left undone many things for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are different in some way. That we must change. And in that effort we can become an important agent for reconciliation in our community.

Ultimately though this is not a political matter for us, but a religious and theological matter because our Presiding Bishop has continued to invite us to become part of the Jesus movement. Remember Jesus was changing not just a religious system, but a political one as well. There was no separation for him. That change was and is the coming of the kingdom and what does that kingdom look like? It's right there in the Book of Common Prayer, in the baptismal promises that we reaffirm on page 392.

So please turn to that page instead of the Nicene Creed and let us renew those promises to be part of the Jesus movement, to live into those promises that we make and reaffirm several times a year. This is our call to action. This is our call to live as Christians. This is the answer to the question if you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you beyond a shadow of a doubt. This is the antidote to Charlottesville.