



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

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Sermon for the Ninth Sunday of Pentecost

August 2, 2020

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Assisting Bishop of Long Island

"You give them something to eat." (Matthew's Gospel: chapter 14, verse 16)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in the sight of the Lord, our friend and our redeemer even as I speak to you in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

As a Ghanaian, and for that matter, an African, I like telling stories and listening to stories. I crave your indulgence to listen to just one and one only story.

Six men, born blind, heard of an elephant in a nearby zoo. They had heard that it is the largest or the biggest of all the animals walking on the earth. Filled with anxiety, they went to "see" the elephant. When they got there, each started touching the elephant. The first held the tail. The second held one of its legs. The third touched their stomach. The fourth held the trunk. The fifth touched the ear and the sixth touched the tusk.

On their way back home, each expressed his experience. The one who touched and held on to the tail exclaimed, "Oh, I see the elephant is just like a big rope."

The second who touched the leg, disagreed with the first exclaiming, "The elephant is like a big tree.

The third blind man who had touched the stomach interjected, "Wow! What are you people talking about? The elephant I saw is like a huge wall."

The fourth man who touched the trunk, jumped in and said, "Wait a minute! Which elephant did you people go to? See the one I saw is like a big water hose."

The fifth one, who touched the ear, laughed. He laughed loudly and exclaimed, "The elephant I saw his like a big fan."

Having waited patiently for his turn, the sixth blind man who touched the tusk shouted, "You are all wrong! The elephant I saw is like a trumpet!"

Dear sisters and brothers, this story tells us one thing. And it is that truth is one, but there can be many facts which go into truth. Facts can change depending upon circumstances, but truth doesn't.

It is true that the elephant on the land is the biggest animal. While we are told that the whale in the sea is a bigger mammal than the elephant. A big animal has big parts.

Therefore, each of the six blind men was stating facts about the truth. All together make the elephant.

In just the same way, our mindset about the human race must be based on truth. And that is life first, rights second. Life from the Creator, God, to each one of us is what makes us loving and living souls. The body exists and performs any kind of function because there is life in it. As soon as that life leaves their body, a major chapter comes to an end. No dead body fights for its rights.

As long as we are alive, we can fight for our rights. We can defend our rights. And I here referred to the First Amendment and the Second Amendment. But then the bottom line is we must first be alive. Then whatever follows, follows.

Jesus once exclaimed, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly." (John's Gospel: chapter 10, verse 10)

In this attempt to make people have life and have it in abundance, he went about preaching, teaching and healing. His appealing leadership skills drew more people to himself. Hence the great crowd going into Him at a lonely place after He had withdrawn from popular places of action on an account of the brutal killing of John, the Baptist by King Herod.

Jesus was at a lonely place with the disciples, but He was not left alone. The people who came to Him in droves to listen to Him. He did not complain nor did He make any attempt to desert the crowd. He said He received them and taught them for hours. And as our gospel for the day says, the disciples began to feel uncomfortable with the presence of such a large group of people at a lonely place that had no supporting facilities. When they tried to prevail on Him to send the crowd away on account of food sustenance, He gave them the shock of their lives with our text for meditation, "You give them something to eat."

This expression is captured in all the Synoptic Gospels, the three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 14:16, Mark 6:37 and Luke 9:13. No matter what kind of interpretation one puts on the feeding of the 5,000 men and more by Jesus, one cardinal truth stands out very clearly and it is this: The needs of humanity is the concern of the God who created us.

Jesus showed the concern first by making use of all available resources. And second, by bringing about hope into a situation that seemed gloomy. And third by teaching the lesson, that all things are possible with God.

"You give them something to eat," Jesus told his disciples. And so it came to pass that He blessed the resources available to them at that hour: five loaves and two fish.

One may ask, when did the loaves and the fish begin to multiply? Was it from the hands of Jesus to the disciples or from the hands of the disciples to the people, the multitude? All of that we read of in Holy Scriptures is that a miracle did occur. All the people had enough with some leftovers.

Sisters and brothers, the same Jesus is with us now. The book of Hebrews would declare, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13, verse 8).

The eternal presence of the divine in the life of humanity is truth that cannot, and must not, be contested nor denied. The Incarnational Word is with us. You and I are being directed by the same God through the leadership of church and state to make good use of the resources available to us. As we fight together the COVID-19 pandemic, all the safety health protocols available to us must be used judiciously: face mask, social or physical distancing, hand-washing and using of hand sanitizer.

As we diligently observe such protocols, we together help to bring about hope for a better future. And that is my second point.

Oh yes, there is always light at the end of the tunnel! Humanity in general does not have to die in thousands because of COVID-19 due to our carelessness. One of the good news that God gave to humanity in the creation story of Genesis Chapter One is to have dominion over creation. Why then must we allow COVID-19 to have dominion over us? All because we are insisting on our rights. We are preoccupied with the economy. We are insisting on having good time with our friends. All at the expense of our lives. We need to do soul searching.

Sisters and brothers, "There is time for everything." (Ecclesiastes: Chapter 3, Verse 1) Good times will soon come to replace the current gloomy one for the God of the mountain is the same God of the valley.

Thirdly, and finally, in allowing God to direct us through our leaders, we shall always come to the realization that all things are possible with God. Our Long Island Diocesan Task Force, chaired by our bishop diocesan, Lawrence Provenzano, together with the other bishops and the clergy and lay, and the supporting team, has been working tirelessly to keep all of us safe within the context of the New York State safety protocols. The signs are positive.

New York State that used to be the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the whole world is now seen as one of the safe, if not the safest, places in the United States of America. Oh, all praise and thanks to God almighty for giving our New York State a dynamic leadership in the persons of Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor De Blasio and their team. We also thank God for our doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and all paramedical personnel who are working day in and day out to make us strong and smile at every storm in our lives.

Yes, indeed, dear People of God, "We can do all things in Christ who strengthens us." (Philippians: chapter 4, verse 13) I know this through my own personal experience in my few years here in the United States of America. My very, very good experiences in the parish of Saint Augustine's Episcopal Church on Avenue D and Saint Gabriel's Episcopal Church on Hawthorne Street. The good people take good care of each other and I know we can do it.

With my relationship with bishop of the diocese and all other bishops in the diocese and other clergy and dear ones, I believe strongly that we are better placed to hold ourselves together and make this gloomy picture pass over once and for all because united we stand, divided we fall.

Our dear sisters, Janet Adam and Denise Fillion, who together with all the other team in the diocesan office have worked very hard. It is a joy to be in the midst of such good people.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is often times referred to as a Lion of Judah and also as a Lamb of God in Holy Scriptures. When it comes to the truth, Jesus roars like a lion. But when it comes to caring for the people, Jesus is as humble and gentle as a lamb.

We may have our differences in terms of how we see life, and for that matter, how we approach life. But in all, we need to pursue the truth: that life is a priceless commodity we

cannot bargain for. We ought to be reminded constantly that our diversity is our strength and our unity is our power.

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, let us try to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. May God almighty bless us all in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.