

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

January 17, 2016

2 Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 62: 1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

In May of last year, I received a request from our Bishop that St. Andrews consider extending a welcome to a Bishop who was visiting Grand Rapids from Kenya. Bishop Joseph Wassengo and his wife Jennepha of the Kenyan Diocese of Masseno West were planning to be here in Grand Rapids visiting their daughter and her family. They were hoping to find a congregation where the Bishop could preach and celebrate. I was inclined to extend the invitation to Bishop Joseph, but because of the strained relationship between the Anglican Church in Kenya and our Episcopal Church, I wanted to know where the visiting Bishop stood on issues of sexuality and the ordination of women. Bishop Joseph, his wife and I met over lunch and had a lengthy conversation. They were absolutely delightful. Bishop Joseph told me that he was part of a group of African Anglican Bishops who were in conversation with Bishops in Canada and the United States who were committed to ongoing conversation regarding our churches and our ministries. We discussed how each province in the Anglican communion proclaims the Gospel in different contexts. Each province faces different challenges. Even with our differences, we can support each other in prayer and common ministry.

You may remember the Sunday in June when they joined us for liturgy. Bishop Joseph preached at both of our Sunday liturgies. His sermon at 8:00 was about 30 minutes long. After the 8:00 liturgy I mentioned to him that the sermon was a bit longer than our folks were accustomed to. So, with that bit of information, his sermon at 10:00 was even longer. (I should have known better than to ever give instructions about preaching to a bishop.) He preached and sang with great passion and humor. He spoke about the ministries of his diocese that seek to mentor young people. He spoke about ministry efforts to provide adolescent girls with sanitary napkins so they would not have to interrupt their times at school. He spoke of the ongoing efforts to minister to those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Most of all he spoke about Jesus. With the differences in context and challenges Anglicans face around the world, with the differences Christians face around the world, what we have in common is Jesus. Jesus is the one who unites. Jesus is the good news we proclaim. Jesus is at the heart of our message.

I have thought about Bishop Joseph much this past week. As you may know, the leaders of each Anglican province, the primates of the world wide Anglican communion, met this past week in England. They discussed many issues facing the Anglican communion. They issued a statement affirming their desire to walk into the future together. They also issued a statement which sanctioned the Episcopal Church for our decisions to celebrate the marriages of gay and lesbian persons. It's not clear what the sanction means. It is certainly at least a public slap on the wrist. It is certainly a decision meant to bring about a change our Church. It is a decision that has caused pain to members of our congregation who are gay and lesbian, as well as those of us who love them. But, as embarrassing and painful as it has been, it will not prevent our Church from our commitment to offer radical welcome to all of God's children. Bishop Houglan and Presiding Bishop Michael Curry have committed to church to continue to move forward on the path to fully embrace persons who are gay and lesbian.

In his response to the decision of the Anglican Primates, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminded Episcopalians that as members of the Episcopal Church, we are part of the Jesus Movement. As partners in this Jesus movement we are confident that the cause of God's love in this world can never stop and will never be defeated.

We are part of the Jesus movement. That is central to our life and identity. We are part of the Jesus movement. And Jesus is the gift we offer the world. "Give me Jesus" the anthem of the day announces. "Give me Jesus".

Our Gospel this morning gives us Jesus. The wonderful story of the changing of water into wine at the wedding is a revelation, an epiphany of Jesus. This was the first manifestation of his glory. In the Gospel story of Cana, no other names are mentioned except Jesus. The steward is not named, the disciples are not named, the mother of Jesus is not named. Even the bride and groom are not named. Only Jesus is named. This is not about wine, not about a wedding, not about his mother. This story is about Jesus.

Jesus is the one who matters. Jesus is the one who transforms ordinary water into the best of wines. Jesus is the one who sanctifies relationships. Jesus is the one who reveals the Glory of God in the most human of moments. Jesus.

We do believe that the Church is the Body of Jesus Christ alive in the world. We believe that by the power of the Spirit the Church reveals Jesus to the world. But no church, not St. Andrews, not the Episcopal Church, not the Anglican Communion, not the Baptist, Roman, or Reformed or Lutheran or any other church fully embodies Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives to individuals and denominations different gifts and manifestations of the Spirit for the common good. We need each other, and none of us is complete without the other. We give thanks for the gifts we have been given, but we humbly confess that our gifts are not enough. The world needs the gifts the Spirit has poured forth on other people, denominations and faiths. Thank God there are varieties of gifts, services and activities, all given by the Spirit. All given by the Spirit to empower the Jesus movement. All given so that we might give Jesus to the world.

This morning I pray for Bishop Joseph, his wife Jennepha and the diocese of Masseno West in Kenya. I give thanks for the Church of the Province of Kenya and the Anglican Churches around the world. I pray for their ministries and difficult challenges each of these provinces face. I give thanks for the Episcopal Church the gifts we have, the challenges we face, and the witness we continue to give. I give thanks for the gifts of the Spirit that we have been given. Each of you has been blessed by the Spirit with gifts for the common good.

We believe in Jesus, and we must not keep silence. We believe that Jesus is the vindication that all nations and people are searching for. We believe that his life, his power, his presence and his love continue to bring hope and transformation to the world. . We pray that with the gifts the Spirit has poured upon each one of us, we may have the courage give Jesus to the world and to take our part in the Jesus movement.