

The Fourth Sunday of Pentecost
 A Sermon preached by
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 Christ Church, Dartmouth

June 28, 2020

“Bulletproof Vest”

Last week Canon Jody opened his sermon by referencing *Star Wars a New Hope* and how it serves as the prologue for the film franchise. He went on to talk about the cosmos, the word, and creation. Today I want to pick up on that and ask the question where does this creation go? Where does it lead us, and what are the challenges that we face in our relationship with God and one another? Are we able to make that leap of faith when we are tested by God and one another?

Do you ever wonder how things are invited and tested, and what sacrifice is needed to make things just so? Last week there was an image floating around the internet that I felt was quite interesting. It’s an image of a man standing less than ten feet from another man who was pointing a gun at him at point-blank range. The man who was being threatened had on one of the first bulletproof vests. This image was released by the Protective Garment Corporation of New York. By 1923, they had manufactured a lightweight vest for police use, and this image captured their live demonstration. At the Washington DC headquarters, the inventors, and salesman were trying to convince the police force that these bulletproof vests worked and save lives.

The man in the vest was fired upon twice with .38 round slugs straight tot the chest, and he “didn’t bat an eye.” Some would say that the man took a leap of faith in allowing himself to be sacrificed for corporate America and the safety of our law enforcement officials. But the bulletproof vest was born, after a brutal demonstration.

Today’s Old Testament reading is well, quite frankly brutal. It’s disgusting at first glance and complicated, so often as the “Good Book” can be. In the 22nd chapter of Genesis, we already have God testing Abraham. He calls out to Abraham, who immediately obeys God’s commandment. Abraham is to take his only son, Isaac, to Moriah, and offer him up as a burnt offering. He is essentially bringing his son to slaughter in the name of God.

What would you do? Of course, I’d say no friggin way! I’m not taking my son to kill him by knife, so God can see how much I would sacrifice. I’m not going to play that game! Just as Abraham is to kill his son, a ram walks through the bush, and it is said that the Lord provided the ram to Abraham at the last minute as a reward for his loyalty. So, Abraham passed the test, that being “What would you do for God.”

This story really focuses on the fact that much of what we do in life is done with fear and trembling. Often there is a dilemma that we face when we have a choice to make, only to find the ram appearing in the thicket. The Lord always seems to provide. Sometimes following God, being a Christian might mean that we have to reflect on our values and what God is calling us

to. But yes, what a weird way for God to show this dilemma. And with that provision, we are to do likewise, we are to provide as God provides for us.

Our gospel in Matthew picks up with this test of faith. Matthew teaches us how the church is called to trust, even when things don't look copesetic. God rewards those who live out faithful lives as Christians. When we welcome, we are appreciated. Love thy neighbour kind of stuff! Jesus says to his followers:

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple - truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:40-42)

In 2020, let's give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple. As we remember Donald Trump holding a Bible in front of St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, the media failed to record something. What we didn't hear were the reports that members of the parish were standing on the perimeter of their property, handing out water and provisions to protesters who were in need. In many ways, the members of the parish were encouraging them to protest and that their church was a safe place to do so, even after it was vandalized.

And then there's the story I heard when I was in South Africa when Desmond Tutu was first made a Bishop. In his address at his consecration, he talked about water and its importance and said that if anyone ever wanted a cup of water, to come by the Bishop's Lodge and they would receive it. People took this literally, and you could often see Tutu on the porch with cold glasses of water that he was passing out to people as they continued their long journey.

That's what Christianity is about, that's what we are about. A simple act, a simple cup of cold water on a hot day, can go along way to lift one's spirits. A simple act of kindness in a world that is brutal. As Tutu once said, *“There's no question about the reality of evil, of injustice, of suffering, but at the center of this existence is a heart beating with love.”*

And what do we do when we find ourselves unable to offer a friend or an enemy a glass of water? Well, we could start with Paul and his words:

“Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.” (Romans 6:12-23)

Our call is to form that relationship with Jesus and to reflect on the things we've done and left undone. Our call is to know that we are sinful, that we screw up, that we are found again and again by God's loving Grace. That even though we live in a tough world, and at times we put on that bulletproof vest, we are called to trust God, and what God has in store for us.

So, what are you going to do today? Are you going to pass out water? Are you going to live like Abraham and make the sacrifice no matter how brutal? Or will you take Jesus' words to heart and practice radical hospitality, radical love, by being that sustenance for life, that living water that flows from our hearts, as we seek to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. AMEN.