

GRACE CHURCH
PENTECOST 5 (Proper 8 RCL, track one)

Honesdale, PA
29-30 June 2019

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Luke 9: 51-62

R I C E
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I love RICE.
Not the kind I had Tuesday night in a freeze dried camping package,
but the acronym:

Reach
Invite
Connect
Engage

It translates to what we as a local parish need to consider.
At our monthly Vestry dinner a few weeks ago,
we asked the same sort of question
and we need to brainstorm on how we - each one of us -
need to - and can - do that.

Reach
Invite
Connect
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But first, let's look to a foundation of Holy Scripture
and our readings for today, going somewhat backwards.
In the Good News, Jesus invites several people to follow in the Way,
"Follow me."
And they come up with what we might consider
legitimate and reasonable excuses.

I'll come with you tomorrow.
And you know tomorrow will never come.
Maybe, like the Galatians, they see Christians acting un-godly:
like wild animals, hurting and harming each other.
"Sorry, I don't want to be a part of that."
But those who are truly spiritual, St. Paul instructs, are filled with
love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
humility and self-control.

Most of us fall short on at least 7 of those nine fruit.
But we are trying.
And maybe that's what we need to demonstrate -
that we *are* trying -
we're still human, and yet Redeemed.
Perfection will only come in the After-This-Life.

But we need to keep trying,
failing in 6, then 5, then maybe just 4 of them -
finally achieving 7 or 8 of the fruit -
almost perfection!

Perhaps that RICE needs an appetizer of FRUIT.

Before we can reach out to a potential new Christian,
we need a majority of those nine fruit of God's Holy Spirit:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility and self-control.

Let me pause for a moment while we each contemplate that:
Before we can reach out and invite someone to Grace Church
we need to harvest more of the fruit of God's Holy Spirit:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility and self-control.

When I help with a Boy Scout's Board of Review,
we rehearse the Scout Law:
A scout is Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous and so forth -
pretty much like the Fruit of the Spirit.

I ask each Scout, "Which one of the 12 is the easiest for you?"

And then I ask, "Which one is the hardest for you?"

What about you?

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faith,
humility, self-control.

Which is the easiest for you?

Which is the hardest to master?

Our Collect reminds us of our foundations, our heritage.
The teaching of the prophets, the faith of the Apostles
and the Gospel story of Jesus as the foundation stone.

In our first reading today,
the next generation picks up the cloak of the one who preceded.

He looks on the past and that which is lost with sorrow.
Elijah was gifted as the greatest prophet in ancient Israel,
and Elisha now has to carry that tradition forward.

He picks up the cloak of his forebear, and asks,
"Where are you, now, God?"
read, "What the hell am I supposed to do now?"

And without thinking about it, throws the cloak of tradition into the water
and he passes through the river's torrent
to a new purpose, calling and ministry.

"Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?"

Right here.

We need to believe that
and proclaim it.

Reach - Invite - Connect - Engage

Vestry is always discerning how we bring more people into Grace Church.
(Ultimately, I am more concerned about bringing more people to Christ,
and if Grace Church is that vessel,
bringing them to know and love God,
so much the better.)

How do we ask people to join us - not follow, but join us, hand in hand,
in the journey with Christ?

Reach Out
Invite In
Connect To
Engage With.

Reach Out

You encounter at least one person each day who needs to hear the Good News of Christ. How do you reach out? Listen. Listen to their story. All they need is someone to listen in the midst of noise.

Invite In

“You know. Why don’t you come with me on Sunday - maybe Saturday’s service would be more comfortable. But come and just sit. That’s all you need to do. And I’ll pray that God touches you.”

And don’t forget to make them feel welcomed and wanted.

Connect

You’ve just done that. Now, once they’ve gotten in the door and in a few weeks become comfortable, welcome and wanted - wanted by you, by us, by God - then when they are comfortable - and only when they are comfortable - connect them. Encourage them to get connected to some ministry in the parish - as if they are needed. They want to be wanted, they want to be needed. But only at their comfort level.

Engage

And this is the hook and sinker. We’ve got them. They’ve got Christ. They’ve found Grace and God has them.

And then...

Then, they will start the process with someone else they know,
who needs Christ’s Grace and God’s Love.
The Church’s stones are added, like Lego bricks, one upon one,
as the foundation of Christ, the prophets and apostles supports us.

“Follow me,” Jesus says.

Of course we will.

And we’ll reach out, invite in, connect to, and engage with
those who need, those who want, to follow Jesus with us.

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Let's conclude by praying together today's Collect
which was meant to bind us together as we gathered this morning,
building the Church, one Lego at a time,
higher and higher, on the true Foundations Stone:

adapted

Almighty God, you have built your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone:

Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;

we pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, O God, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

Making Excuses

thanks to Sermons4Kids.com