

What in God's Name Are We doing?

A sermon by the Rev. H. Paul Canady III

Rector of Christ Church, New Bern, NC, on September 30, 2018

http://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp21_RCL.html

If you've ever had that moment where someone you've known for a while, maybe not that well, an acquaintance, has a similar interest, love of the same band or author or alumnus of the same school, maybe you lived in the same city at the same time but never knew each other... then maybe you have a glimmer of what the apostle John was feeling at the beginning of today's Gospel

The first part of the today's Gospel lesson once again shows how the 12 Apostles, those closest to Jesus just don't get it sometimes. It's a curious little scene in Mark's Gospel that is not repeated in the other Gospels, though there is a parallel to a conversation in the book of Numbers where Moses gets a bit fussy with Joshua. It makes me wonder, too, if Jesus knew about this healer, too. Whether they have had a conversation that John and the other disciples didn't know about. I imagine Jesus had lots of conversations that didn't make it into the Gospels. So when John says, "*Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us,*" I imagine Jesus saying something along the lines of, "*George? Yeah! I know him. He's kinda doing his own thing, but don't worry about it for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.*"

It's important for me to say here in this space that there are a lot of people who say and do things and they invoke one or more parts of the Trinity as a justification for what they say and do. I hope we can acknowledge that unfortunately, sometimes those things which are said and done do not give life. And it is indeed NOT of God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit if it is destructive to God's creation and creatures. In fact, there are way too many examples in the history of Christianity of destructive behavior on behalf of God and the church that we need to repent and apologize for. Too many things that did not reflect the loving, liberating, live-giving message of Jesus.

This unknown disciple does not fit into that category. This guy heals in Jesus' name and is giving life and wholeness to those who need it. We have no clue how this guy came to know the name of Jesus. Maybe he was in the synagogue when Jesus cast out the demons or he was in the crowd when Jesus fed the multitudes or he had been one of John the Baptist's disciples who made the move to Jesus when John was arrested. Who knows... Whatever it was, the message of Jesus got a hold of him and he knew that through Jesus, lives would be transformed. I'd like to say that 2,000 years of history has taught followers of Jesus that others can do different things in his name, but we still, from time to time, are like the disciple John, a little jealous and defensive of the work that others might be doing.

Archbishop Ndungane of South Africa caused great consternation among Anglicans and Episcopalians a few years back when he raised the question, “Why can’t the Holy Spirit be doing something different in different parts of the world?” To rotate that question a little bit, why can’t followers of Jesus be doing different things in the same place.

So allow me a moment to be blunt: **What in God’s name are you doing? And what in God’s name are we as a parish family doing?**

I ask that loaded question because I, we, could go on for hours and hours about all we are doing in God’s name for the good of this parish and for the good of this community. Big things and small things. Places where people here are providing leadership and places where we see uphold the leadership of others. To be sure... there are plenty of other faith-filled people who call New Bern home who are, in God’s name, make a difference in here and beyond. Just like Jesus’ words to John, no one gets a monopoly on being the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus in our world.

People of Christ Church share in leadership in important ways in this part of the world. Elected and appointed government officials. Board members of major and minor non-profits. Leadership in cooperation between houses of worship and congregations. Teachers, doctors, nurses, bankers, photographers, engineers, retirees: All of them and all of us doing what we do for the sake of and because of the message of Jesus. Because each of us experience Jesus in a different way, we share in the ministry of Jesus in a different way, too. As we share in that ministry in our own ways, we then come back together to be recharged, refreshed, and renewed to continue that ministry week by week and month by month.

Hurricane Florence landed less than a week after we launched our annual stewardship campaign. It was really very inconsiderate of her... :) As life begins to return to a new normal, I hope you will consider, if you haven’t already, how you will support Christ Church not only now, but in 2019. Not only with your time and talent, but with your treasure, too. It’s dollars that allow for paper for Sunday bulletins, phone and internet and postage for communications, power to turn on the lights, and insurance to protect this beautiful and holy space. Dollars that provide for a staff that works diligently and faithfully to provide programing, support, and leadership here, in the community and in the Diocese of East Carolina. Increased giving would allow us to have a staff member dedicated solely to communications. It’s that same giving that enables us to provide assistance to local social service agencies who work in the name of Jesus to assist those in need, those who fall through the holes of other safety nets and makes formation opportunities available for people to know more about God and the church, and to help discern how and where God is asking them to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. As New Bern recovers from Hurricane Florence, pledge dollars will help in hosting groups who come from near and far to be a part of the rebuilding efforts. Your faith-filled giving to God’s work here empowers us to share in the work of Jesus together as the people of Christ Church and the faithful of New Bern and Craven County. Most of all, giving back to God through Christ Church allow us, as a community of faith in all our various ways, to continue to do the loving, liberating, live-giving work of Jesus in the world.

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I am thankful to the households that have already pledged and help put us over one-quarter of the way to our million dollar goal. I know that for many, Hurricane Florence put a dent in your household budget and you may not be able to give what you gave previously. That is incredibly understandable. I hope those of you who haven't pledged will consider an increase, as you are able, to help make up the difference. We will

HELP US CONTINUE TO DO THE LOVING, LIBERATING, LIVE-GIVING WORK OF JESUS IN THE WORLD.