

Sermon
16 Pentecost—Proper 18-C
September 8, 2013
William Bradbury

Jeremiah 18:1-11
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14:25-33

We went to see The Butler a couple of weeks ago and it reminded me how brutal racism was in the south. Fortunately I grew up in Atlanta with enlightened parents who would send us to our room if we ever uttered a racial slur. But I had friends whose parents used those slurs themselves.

For my friends this made it doubly hard to escape the racist mindset and live into the freedom from hate we have as children of God.

You and I are not born with hatred in our hearts, but rather as the song from "South Pacific" says, "you have to be carefully taught" to hate. **And once we are taught we will live in that destructive mindset until someone sets us free from it.**

Jesus came precisely to set us free from these family-taught, culture taught mindsets that destroy the dream God has for creation. He sets us free by his example of eating meals with all types of people, by his teaching about wedding banquets in which the poor are also invited, and by telling us to love not only our friends but also our enemies.

But Jesus' example and teaching are just so much noise until we realize he is talking to us--addressing me and you as individuals, calling us to come out of the nightmare of a dystopic world, with all its "-isms" that hurt creation.

He does it this morning in a way that is breathtaking. He says: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

When he says "hate" our family and life itself, he is not contradicting his call to love your neighbor, which includes our family. Rather he is using Semitic hyperbole to call us away from the belief in the infallibility of our family, race, nation, way of life, and even our religion.

Jesus does not hate his Blessed Mother Mary. But he also does not blindly follow her when she is trapped in a distorted view of life. When Mary and other family members ask him to leave his ministry to come home to rest because he is obviously out of his mind, he looks around at his disciples and says, whoever does the will of my Father is my family.

Jesus never goes back to the small worldview of Nazareth. Rather Mary and his brother James follow Jesus into God's universal view of the world.

Jesus did not come to tweak our lives, but to transform them and he does this by pulling us out of our tiny ego view of things, so we can see how beautiful life is through God's eyes.

This is a huge thing Jesus is doing so he also tells us to count the cost.

Lots of religious folks talk about the importance of being born again, but they do not often talk about that you must first die to your old life if you want to live in the new one God gives us.

We can't inhabit the Mind of Christ without first being set free from the mind of the world.

You can't become a person of acceptance and peace without dying to the racist and war-lover you used to be.

This transformation is God's free gift which can't be earned or achieved through our effort. The Mind of Christ is given to us, so our only task is to believe and trust that is who we already are in Christ.

We receive Holy Communion week after week so that one day when we hear the words "Body of Christ" we will know they refer not just to the bread but to us—to you and to me.

We are the Body of Christ, I am the Body of Christ, says Saint Paul.

This gift is free but there is a cost.

I think of Paul Jones—not John Paul Jones the Revolutionary War naval captain—but Paul Jones who became the Episcopal bishop of Utah in 1914. We celebrated his feast day this past Wednesday at our noon chapel service.

As the nation became excited about the prospect of entering World War I, Paul Jones announced that war was not the way of Christ and that America should not enter it.

I know of no one today who argues that WW I was a just war or even a smart one, because all it produced was millions dead, orphaned, and widowed. It wasn't the war to end all wars, as advertised; rather it was the war that created the conditions for the ascent of Adolf Hitler and the start of the Second World War.

Yet most churchgoing Americans were very much in favor of sending our boys to fight.

“It will be glorious”, they said. “Surely God is on our side”, they said.

They were blind to the idea that maybe God is not pleased when Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Baptists, slaughter each other for nothing more than national pride and a few miles of barren earth.

Almost everyone was caught up in this war fever yet somehow Paul Jones and some Quakers and Mennonites were able to step outside the mind of family and nation and walk in the mind of Christ.

But there was a cost: he was hated by Christians everywhere and told by a commission of the House of Bishops that he must resign as Bishop of Utah, which he did in 1918. But he doesn't stop working for Christ, as he helps found the Episcopal Peace Fellowship which continues his work today.

Jesus looks around at the large crowd following him and challenges them to drop their worldly minds and to take on the Mind of Christ.

We are the Body of Christ. He is calling us to be who we are.

As Saint Paul says in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ and **it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,^[a] who loved me and gave himself for me."

When we first wake up we slowly fight our way out of sleep into what we call the real world. But as long as we think our tiny view of things is reality we are still caught in the nightmare that is destroying us.

We are the Body of Christ slowly waking up to his presence in us and his desire to work through us to transform the world into the dream of God.

So as we start off this new program year I encourage us all to give up trying to tweak our lives and instead turn our lives over to Christ for transformation.

Only men and women being transformed by Christ can share God's dream for the world.