

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Various

“If Not Now, When?”

We are very glad to be home, and I must tell you how much we missed being with you. I know it was just one weekend – but... it was fantastic to be reunited with our daughter Theresa, son in law Andrew, and our grandchildren Essey and Eliana and the dogs. Covid had prevented us from visiting them in Pennsylvania, and while electronic visits are nice there is nothing like in person time together. You cannot get and give hugs and kisses electronically! I want to thank Deacon Bob for leading the worship last week – he did a fine job!

The last two weeks, the two Gospel readings are very similar, with Jesus speaking to the people proclaiming His true identity – *“I am the Bread of Life.”* He says that no one can get to the Father without receiving the Bread of Life – and that Bread is Jesus Christ, there is no one else. It is not about how we behave that gets us to heaven – but it is about WHO we know, and WHO we love and receive.

The Apostle Paul today reminds us, the church, about our behavior and how we are to treat one another in any kind of relationship. Paul tells us what to do with that humility, and how we are supposed to be. Based on his letter to the Ephesians, it seems to me that the people of the early church in Ephesus were not the kindest people that you might meet.

The Apostle Paul writes that good behavior is not and should not be negotiable – and it is absolutely necessary for us to be considerate of one another. First and foremost – we need to be honest with each other. In verse 25 he writes, *“speak truthfully to your neighbor.”* This is a reference to the Prophet Zechariah through who God tells us *“These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;”* *“do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.* (Zechariah 8:16-17) Examples are backbiting, lies, false witness against your neighbor, rumors, and gossip. The fact remains that none of them are any good to the Body of Christ. It is also important that we need to be the same person that people see in church – all of the time. And so I want to ask a question and this is meant for each one of us: who are you when no one is looking? You might be riding in your car, or sitting alone and reading - are you the same person that gets all dressed up to come to church on Sunday?

Paul is telling the church of yesterday and today, to “behave yourself!” Be truthful; watch what you say and how you say it. Words can have a tremendous impact on any relationship. And while you are at it- do not steal, and don’t give the enemy a foothold by holding onto anger. Have you ever seen someone who is angry? Their face shows it. My father once said that I do not have a poker face. When I am upset or angry, you will know! I stop talking, you know – we have these signs that show people. Remember the old song *“And They’ll know we are Christians by our love?”* When we are labeled as Christians, maybe you have a fish or ichthus on the back of your car – you are telling people you are a Christian. I hope you drive like one!

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, August 8, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

We just went up and back on I-95 and there were a whole lot of people with that symbol on their car and thank God it is not how your drive will get you to heaven. We were watching people zipping in and out and some guy almost took the front of our car off because he was following a car that was in front of him that was doing the same thing. You know what I am talking about. We have all seen it, and it makes you pray even more. We begin every trip – even if it just to the doctor – praying that the Lord would put His angels to surround our car – protecting us and getting us where we are going and get us home safely. The spotlight is on each one of us. People are watching and wondering how you are behaving. Paul is asking believers to not be hypocrites – calling themselves Christians but not acting like a Christian. You don’t know how many people, especially young people, become terribly confused – as they watch the behavior and language of people who say they are Christians – and are completely turned off, thinking – “do I really want to be like that?” The behavior is not only visible today but was most certainly visible in Paul’s day as well – causing him to write letters to the churches that he visited and ministered to – like Ephesus. When we do all of the things that Paul warns us of – that is what grieves the Holy Spirit – when we mistreat our brothers and sisters in Christ! Simply said - we are called to be considerate of one another. The Lord knows that we are not perfect. None of us!

These past 18 months have been unlike anything we have ever endured. They do not teach you how to handle this in seminary. They do not teach schoolteachers how to handle a mask in class or how to do Zoom or Google Classroom in college. We had to fly by the seat of our pants these past 18 months. Beginning March 15, and for months the churches were closed, we finally opened our doors again on May 31st, 2020, continuing our newly created video ministry. However, not everyone has returned to church, and I know that there are several that have said – “I will return to church in the fall.” My question is – why are you waiting? You are the church. I know that it is very comfortable to watch your church service in your PJ’s with a cup of coffee, but that is not going to church. We are broadcasting the service for those people who cannot come to church for health reasons and not necessarily for convenience. I want to suggest to you that it is not what you get out of church – but it is what you bring into church that really matters, your presence, your fellowship, and your worshipping inside the church – to the glory of God. I want to suggest to you again- it is not what you get out of church – but what it is what you bring to church. We continue to take every precaution for safety – with masks available, with two bottles of hand sanitizer in every pew. We have reopened nursery and children’s church – and those who are serving Holy Communion are wearing masks for your safety. If not now – when? There are so many who are out and about in stores and other events – but have put off coming to church – if not now – when?

I want to share with you some words that Luke wrote in the Book of Acts about how the early church spent time “together.” From Acts 2:42-44, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.”* In spite of persecution, these

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, August 8, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

believers gathered together – devoting themselves to the teachings and fellowship. That word – fellowship is a very churchy word – you don’t say ‘I am going to my son’s baseball game to fellowship’ or to your daughter’s event to ‘fellowship,’ instead you come to church to gather as the Body of Christ to fellowship and receive the Bread of Life. You cannot do those things at Walmart or Harvey’s, or even Walgreen’s or at your child’s events – and so I ask you once again – “if not now – when?”

Besides the fellowship – there is the breaking of the Bread – the Bread of Life. In the Anglican Tradition – we are blessed to be able to receive the Sacrament that Jesus gave us. You cannot receive this any other place than at your church. Jesus reminded us in today’s Holy Gospel, “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven.* (I just loved it when Deacon Bob read that because he emphasized “I AM.” Maybe it was because he preached that last Sunday!) *If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*” We have the remarkable opportunity to partake this Sacrament, just as the early church, devoting ourselves to Him and to one another in church. “If not now, when?”