

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost, Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude - October 25, 2015, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 15:17-27

***"Jesus Said it – Now Go and Do it!"***

In the verse right before today's Holy Gospel, on page 1677 of your Pew Bibles - Jesus tells His followers in verse 16 "*you did not choose me, but I chose you*" showing all of us very clearly that Jesus is not a commodity - something on the shelf in a store that we purchase - but instead it is He who has called us, not to be His servants but to be friends in a loving relationship with Him - even though He purchased us on the cross. He also gave us a job to do with this calling, saying that He has "*appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last.*" There is no time to sit around - we have a mission to be doing things in the Name of the Lord. That Name carries such great strength that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Did you know that even the demons must obey and flee at the Name of Jesus? It is amazing and true - the most powerful Name there ever was. We are to be passing on what Jesus has taught us on a hill in Galilee, just as recorded in Matthew 28: where He said we are to be "*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" (Matthew 28:20) These words are a part of what is known as "the Great Commission." My friends what Jesus is telling us is non-negotiable. Jesus said it - now go and do it!

For a moment, let's talk fruit. What do we do with fruit? I know - we consume it to fill us and give us strength, but what do we do to fruit? We do our best to preserve it, right? You might hand the bananas on a hook or you might put the oranges or apples in the fridge or in a bowl for others to see, right? We also use it in ways that make it very delicious to others - like fruit salad, or pies. Oh, I love apple pie! Jesus didn't say that WE were fruit - but that we would BEAR fruit - and make it last! Many times we share fruit with others. Did you ever offer someone a piece of a banana, or Watermelon, or some grapes? See, you know what I mean? Fruit is non-threatening, and is most often very pleasing, to the point of sharing it with others. Jesus said it, now go and do it!

At the very beginning of today's Holy Gospel Jesus says simply "*This is my command: Love each other.*" (John 15:17) His directions could not be simpler - or harder to follow. It is tough sometimes to like some people, let alone love them! Have you ever been in a room and you see someone enter and you immediately walk to the other side? Maybe you don't want confrontation? Or maybe that person may not like you? It happens! It is hard to like people, and it is even harder to love them, but that is what we are called to do.

All of this takes place in the Upper Room, on the night before Jesus is to die, the very night that He is arrested. Our Lord is trying to prepare His disciples, and us, by sharing a glimpse of what is coming. Jesus is just telling it like it is, He is not pulling any punches - and in doing so He is foretelling of the persecution that we are now seeing in the world, today. In places like the Middle East, Asia, South America, Mexico and others - it is unsafe to follow and worship Jesus. You could be arrested for wearing a cross on the outside of your shirt, and in some places for even carrying a Bible! People are reading Bibles, and worshipping in secret, or in home or "underground churches." Gunmen, if you have been following the news, have broken into churches and homes where Bible studies or services are being held - and massacring the Christians. We only need to remember a short time ago in Charlotte, North Carolina, or the event in Oregon. The gunmen ask if people are Christians and then take their lives. This is true, and it is happening - during our lifetimes! Persecution of the church is not a thing of the past, feeding Christians to the lions - it is a real and ongoing thing with no end in sight, until the Lord comes again. When Jesus spoke of the world - He knew that it was beginning in the very

world He came to save – the Hebrews and then spreading onward from Jerusalem toward “*Samaria, Judea and the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8) As people brought the Gospel to the world, parts of the world would strike back with a vengeance. Jesus said in verse 23-25 “*Whoever hates me hates my Father as well.*” “*If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.*” “*But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’*” (John 15:23-25) Psalm 35:19 foretold Jesus being hated without reason and Jesus was proclaiming it fulfilled. When Jesus is talking about the things that no one else did – He was talking about the miracles He did in plain sight! He was not hiding His divinity! He also did not do the miracles to prove His divinity. He performed miracles for one reason, and it is a four letter word – LOVE. Jesus did not pick people out and go over and say “I am going to heal you.” Instead, people came forward and asked “if you are willing, please heal my blindness.” And then there is the woman who crawls in a crowd just to touch the hem of His garment, and Jesus said “*woman, your faith has made you well!*” (Matthew 9:22)

Sadly we can see evidence of the hatred Jesus was talking about and even the very fear of His Name. People are driven to remove the mention of His Name from cards, signs, TV and Radio. They shudder at His Name being spoken at the end of a sporting event in which the hero is asked about his or her efforts and they respond “thank you Jesus.” You can just see the censor wanting to hit the button and clear that out. They do remove it sometimes when they show it in a news broadcast or if they might replay the event. I have been overjoyed each time I watched Nik Wallenda managing on the high wire, speaking all of the time to Jesus, praising His Name and thanking Him for His protection. Network executives must have been tearing their hair out! It doesn’t please the people who are paying for the commercials. People even cringe at and edit the mention of His title – Christ (which means Messiah) – editing it to “season’s greetings” or the ever present “happy holidays!” I can remember working at a radio station where suddenly our *Merry Christmas* jingles were replaced with Happy Holidays being sung – and the mandate from ownership that we not mention Christmas – but use the term “holiday.” Never any explanation –it was just a mandate and we had to follow it, without discussion. This was the beginning of “political correctness” to avoid offending a very vocal few. Christians were never asked if we were offended, **management said it – now go and do it!** We are just two months away from Christmas – and watch what the media does to cloak and shroud the Name of Jesus! I was thrilled last year as I saw a local TV station actually say and have placards that said Merry Christmas! The name of Jesus was not being shrouded. The world says we are not supposed to take it personally. I can’t help it – it makes me sick when He is treated this way. It is far worse in the northern part of this country, and thank you Lord, better in the Bible belt – but it is creeping further and further. Mark my words!

Persecution is not something new. I want you to hear the words of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: (Hebrews 11:35-38) “*Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.*” “*Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.*” “*They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--*” “*the world was not worthy of them.*” Jesus knew this was coming and warned in today’s Holy Gospel: verses 18 and 19: ““*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*” “*If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*” (John 15:18-19) This is not an easy sermon to listen to, but my brothers and sisters – it is reality! Remember His words at the beginning of this Gospel? Jesus says simply “*This is my*

*command: Love each other.*" (John 15:17) Given the persecution – it is often easier said than done. Jesus said it, now go and do it! But how?

Jesus told us *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"* *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* (Matthew 5:43-44) Two very powerful four letter words – **love and pray** – but again –how? Jesus always gave us examples and there is none stronger than when He was dying on the cross and said *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34) I want to suggest to you that one of those four letter words feeds the other: when we pray – we are able to love. God gives us the strength and courage to love the unlovable. Jesus did it, now go and do it!

The Apostle Peter, having received the fruit of the Holy Spirit, was given wisdom to share with us these words: *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."* *"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."* (1 Peter 5:8-10) I want to repeat what Peter said – that God will be with us and that He *"will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."*

There are those that will say “oh, those are words from 2,000 years ago – they don’t relate to me, to today!” Well, I fervently disagree! The words that we have heard today are timeless and will help each of us to deal with the “garbage” that gets flung at us by the world. I just love the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans. They are amazing in giving us strength and guidance for our behavior to those who wrong us. He wrote: *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody."* *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."* *"On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'"* *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12:17-21)

As followers and believers in Jesus Christ we have much more than our enemies, at baptism we receive the Holy Spirit of God, who girds us and gifts us with His fruit: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness," "gentleness and self-control."* (Galatians 5:22-23) Do you remember what I said earlier about fruit? **Fruit is non-threatening, and is most often very pleasing, to the point of sharing it with others.** Jesus told us to *"go and bear fruit--fruit that will last."* Jesus said it – now go and do it!

If you are still worried about how to do all this, especially with those who less than love you? Let’s look at verses 26-27: Jesus said *"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."* *"And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."* (John 15:26-27) Let me just say this about the word “testify.” When you think of it you think of a courtroom, right? You think of someone who is a witness. I want to go back to Acts: 1:8, the very last words that Jesus spoke before ascending to the Father. He stood on the Mount of Olives, directly across from the City of Jerusalem. These words resound because Jesus looked at His beloved disciples and He said *"You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Those were His last words – “witnesses” – tell the truth! Isn’t that amazing? John 8:32 *"You shall know the truth and the*

*truth shall set you free!*” Did you know that those words are in Greek at the center of the Compass Rose, which is the symbol of the Anglican Communion? How prophetic and how wonderful, especially when we heard earlier that Archbishop Foley Beach and the other GAFCON Primates of the faith part of the Anglican Communion will be at the Lambeth Conference in January – to be witnesses, to profess the truth to those who don’t get it. When Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to them, and then to us – we will have the capability of recalling and telling the truth as a testimony. He will give us the words – just as He gave the disciples the words. How do you hide for 50 days, afraid for your life, sneaking out, going to the Galilee and the returning to the Upper Room, scared for your life? Suddenly on the when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, things change. The suddenly have a boldness and each one of those men gave their life for the truth of Jesus Christ, dead, buried, risen and ascended to the Father. The Holy Spirit will give us the words when we need them, just as He gave the disciples words. Jesus had been with them from the beginning and He is with us. And let’s not forget those two four letter words – pray and love – from which we can draw strength, through the Holy Spirit from God the Father.

In closing, I want to share with you some other words that Jesus gave on that very same night, the night that He gave us the Holy Eucharist. Just before His “high priestly prayer” to the Father on our behalf, He said *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace (shalom). In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33) Jesus never asks us to do anything that He hasn’t done before. Remember, He told us: *“you did not choose me, but I chose you”* **Jesus said it – now go and do it!**