

2019 Convention Eucharist Homily
The Right Reverend Terry A. White
Bishop of Kentucky
Proper 27 Year C

Each year, clergy and lay representatives of every Episcopal congregation in western Kentucky gather for a convention. It's was held at Christ Church Cathedral downtown last night and today (Friday night and yesterday), and this gathering offers an awesome opportunity for our diocesan family to be present with one another and celebrate the undeniable reality that each person, each parish, participates in something bigger, something much greater than our own local life.

Much happens at convention, but for me, the most inspiring part of the whole experience is Holy Eucharist, where we stand and praise God as one joyous Body. To that end, it is customary to preach the Bishop's sermon from that service in congregations throughout the diocese, to give us a deeper sense of connection with our brothers and sisters in Christ spread far and wide. So let us hear the words of our Bishop, The Right Reverend Terry A. White, first spoken (last night; Friday night) at the 192nd Convention of the Diocese of Kentucky.

Tom Hanks was not much of a Mister Rogers fan growing up. "I was too busy watching Rocky and Bullwinkle." But his attitude changed a few years back when Hanks received an email from a friend containing a moving clip from Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. The video, from a 1981 episode, featured Rogers greeting a 5 year old boy in a wheelchair named Jeffrey Erlanger.

Rogers asked, 'Jeff, do you ever have days when you're feeling sad?' Jeff replies, 'Well, yeah, sure Mister Rogers. Some days...but not today.'" After a few minutes of conversation

about why Jeff needs to use an electric wheelchair, Mr. Rogers and the boy sang “It’s You I Like.”

“It made me bawl my eyes out,” said Hanks. “It’s one of the reasons why I’m in the movie.” In this Vanity Fair interview Hanks went on to explain why he found Rogers a subject worth reexamining in 2019. “...cynicism has become the default position for so much of daily living, because cynicism is easy, and there’s good money to be made being cynical.” Fred Rogers turned that approach on it’s head by beginning each day singing: “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood.”

And it didn’t stop there. There was the same question Mr. Rogers asked at the start of every show: “Won’t you be my neighbor?” And more importantly, before one could answer, Mr. Rogers said to all, “Hi there, neighbor!”

It is well known that Fred was the Rev. Fred Rogers, an ordained cleric of the Presbyterian Church. So when he said, “Hi there, neighbor” it was pure Jesus, who commanded us: Love your neighbor as yourself. I invite you to hold onto all that as we turn to the Gospel reading.

The Bishop of Texas, Bishop Andrew Doyle, writes: We look at this story in Luke chapter 20 and learn that the religious institution of Jesus’ day sees the reign of God in political terms. Thus, the religious leaders are confused and irritated because Jesus is speaking in a wholly different manner.

Scholar Luke Timothy Johnson put it like this: “here we see the symbolic expression of a closed-horizon religion: the professional religionists who find their reward in earthly recognition in public acclaim and prestige, but who cannot be content with that, and oppress others even as

they parade a public piety.” (LTJ, Luke, 318). In this reading, the religionists seek to entrap and discredit Jesus with a rather absurd question.

But Jesus shows the way out of that power trap, and “expresses the deepest convictions of the Christian community concerning the kingdom of God. Allegiance to God is not spelled out in terms of specific political commitment. Rather it transcends every political expression.

Following this lesson, the chapter ends with Jesus teaching that No king, not even a Jewish king, not even David’s son, can receive the devotion of ‘all the heart and soul and strength and mind’. All that we are belongs to God alone. (LTJ, Luke, 318)

Specifically in this lesson, the point Jesus is making is: God is God of the living. The world is being reshaped as the reign of God: a creation alive, entirely new, completely redeemed and transformed, from the existence we experience today. We see only dimly now what God sees clearly and offers us in his son Jesus Christ.

You and I can get caught up in our cultural contexts that we at times foolishly believe we perceive as God perceives. Behold though, all things are being made new. It is the Holy Spirit, and the Christ of God that we are to share, not solutions focused on preserving our institutions.

Can we in the days, months and years to come share the living God more than we protect the church politic? Can we set aside centuries old notions of Christendom as a political, even governing entity, notions which are carefully guarded and protected at great cost? The key is to become missionaries once again! Dare to share the living Christ with all those who we meet!

Let us lift our heads in order to see that Jesus has left the building, the church building, and is calling us back out into the world. There is joy found in cooperating with the reign of God unleashed as a living spirit in the world. Let us reclaim the Pentecost moment not as the birthday

of the Church, but rather as the beginning of living with a new missionary spirit!

(hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com)

The Rev. Tim Schenk puts it this way: “For us, the altar must act like a slingshot, propelling us to go out into the world to serve its needs with love and compassion. Otherwise we become little more than a quaint, insular preservation society, preserving our own tastes and preferences rather than responding boldly to the divine call to love one another as Jesus loves us.” (Clergyconfidential.org) Propelling us into our neighborhoods, to claim our relationship with our neighbors.

In February of 1999, Fred Rogers was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame. This is an edited excerpt from his speech. Where you hear the word “television” insert “Church.” Fame is a four-letter word; and like life or love, what ultimately matters is what we do with it. I feel that those of us in television are chosen to be servants. It doesn’t matter what our particular job, we are chosen to help meet the deeper needs of those who watch and listen—day and night!

Life is the greatest mystery of all. Together we are to show and tell what the good in life is all about, by doing whatever we can to bring courage to those whose lives move near our own—by treating our “neighbor” at least as well as we treat ourselves and allowing that to inform everything that we produce. Throughout our life we can choose to encourage others to cherish life in creative, imaginative ways.”

My sisters and brothers, my siblings: Faith is a five letter word. Grace is a five letter word. Jesus is a five letter word. Baptism is a – well, it’s got more letters! Mr. Rogers words are for us as the baptized people of God, as individual disciples, as a parish, as a diocese, as a commonwealth.

We have one lifetime in which to cherish and value all those made in God's image. We will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love. The people of our diocese, meaning all of us, are committed in Jesus' name to living out the Love of God and the Love of Neighbor in creative, imaginative, ways, even ways that defy logic.

In baptism, God chose us as servants to help meet the deeper needs of our...neighbor. What is the summary of the law: Love God with everything we have, and love our neighbors the same way, and we love ourselves!

Let this Eucharist, stretch us and slingshot us out to our neighbors in the Commonwealth and beyond, to serve with love and compassion, responding boldly to the divine call to love as Jesus loves us!