



## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH THE GENERAL CONVENTION

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Sermon – June 22, 2008

Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross

Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Paul's letter to the Romans has some disturbing news. The letter tells the Romans "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. "

Understanding the crucifixion and resurrection is life-giving, sustaining and foundational to our faith. This morning we are explicitly called into the death of Jesus in the crucifixion.

As usual, the readings and the words attributed to Jesus, cause us to hear in a new way. And, like the faithful members of the Jesus Team that we are, we pause to let notions be turned upside down, knowing that the language of God can be complicated and it can be simple at the same time. In the case of our readings this morning, just when we thought we could relax, just when think we have truly understood that Jesus died for us and we are saved, we find out that we have to be WITH Jesus in his death, buried WITH him as it says in Romans. We don't just get to sit back and watch. At the same time, we are assured that death has no dominion over Jesus and will have no dominion over US as long as we are WITH Jesus 100% - faithful to Jesus, WITH Jesus, in a death like his we will be united with him in a resurrection like his. Instead of life and death, it is a matter of Death and life. A topsy-turvy concept. Kind of like when I try to explain the Holy Trinity to my granddaughter, who usually responds by saying, "Nana, I just don't get it". How do we get hold of this dying WITH Jesus? How do we grapple with this matter of death and life. Listen to what we heard in the in the reading from Matthew:

*... for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.*

Jesus calls the disciples to courage and transparency. Shout the truth from the housetops, so to speak. He calls us, his disciples, to the same. Is this courage and transparency the DEATH with Christ he is calling us to? Is truth telling the death he calls us to experience so that we too, like Jesus, may be resurrected with him? Perhaps these secrets are those of a timid humankind. Secrets of a people steeped in fear for their own sake. In his life, Jesus uncovered secrets and caused trouble. He spoke on behalf of the marginalized



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people of the society and made them his friends. He ate with thieves and tax collectors. He listened to women and even had them as friends and disciples. He challenged the power structure on behalf of God. He pushed and pushed, until finally he was crucified. As we wonder and pray about what God is calling us to do, what God calls each of us to do, I think we start with telling the truth, and there are many truths to be told. We all have knowledge about inhumane situations, and we tolerate these situations. These are our secrets. These secrets are in the back of our minds, and we push them aside because we feel powerless to speak them out loud and confront them. You know these secrets, too numerous to name: about how we treat prisoners, children in need, children who don't have a safe place to sleep at night, people dying from AIDS, malaria, God's people dying alone, hungry people, scared people, a groaning earth, war. You know these secrets and I am sure there are specific ones that have set up camp in your own mind and heart. These and others not named here, are the secrets of our own fear. The fear of rejection, failure, ostracism, fear of tiredness and fear of commitment, fear of speaking truth to power, fear to be WITH Jesus in death if we say difficult things, if we turn the temple tables over. Fear that renders us speechless.

We have to be courageous if we want to follow Jesus. We have to be the ones to tell the truth because we are followers of Christ, and we have to die a thousand deaths in the process. Death then life. We have to die a thousand deaths of embarrassment at being "outspoken". We have to die a thousand deaths, stepping out in faith. We have to die courageous deaths over and over again if we want to follow Jesus.

And what is God doing while we are dying these thousand deaths in the name of God's Son? God is right with us. God is so close to us, so up close and personal, that God is counting the hairs on our head.

Jesus asks everything of us. How do we respond? So what do we do? He tells us what to do. He tells us to die with him. He tells us to shake things up for him. Just like he did. He shows us time and time again that he is not complacent and he tells us time and time again that we should not be either. He tells us to take up the cross and follow him. We respond with the kind of love for Christ that gives us courage we do not have. Jesus is asking us to tell the truth and to speak and act on his behalf. He asks us to live dangerously for his sake, turn over the tables in the temple, pick up our cross and to die with him.

Carry that cross with courage. Do not walk, run with Jesus - alongside him and the saints who have also run along this path with Jesus before us. Do not allow fear, or confusion or anything stop you. Charge up and get moving. That is what disciples do.

It is a matter of death and life. Amen.