

May 16, 2010

St. James Episcopal Church

The Rev. Kathy Crary

Easter VII

I remember an evening at home when my parents were throwing a cocktail party which usually moved into a poker party. My father was an introvert and my mother an extrovert, sort of. However, they had the amazing ability to put together the loudest and funniest people on the planet for parties. For as staid and Victorian as they were about things, my mom and dad had great friends.

I was doing my homework in my room in the middle of all this hubbub one night. I walked out of my room and into this raucous party and asked my father for help with my math. My dad and most of the men in the room worked in the aerospace industry and some of them, literally, were rocket scientists. Well, Mr. Burrell (we called our elders by their last names back then) said, "Hey, Kathy needs help with her math." That stopped everybody. So he read the story problem out loud with a few embellishments, according with his insane sense of humor. The math problem was about two trains approaching on separate tracks at differing speeds and when would they cross paths, separate tracking the trains, of course. Well, Mr. Burrell said we had to factor in the drag coefficient of the first train that had a new and thicker paint job. This would change aerodynamics and weight considerations, both uphill and downhill would be a factor, and so on and you get the picture.

Over and over, in the Gospel of John, we have dealt with story problem theology, talking about the relationship of God to Jesus, Jesus to

God, the origin and nature of the Spirit and the whole relationship with all that God is and who we are.

I and the Father are one, Jesus says. And I will send you the Holy Spirit, the Advocate... what was that again? God in me, I in you, Spirit upon you. This is story problem immensity. We figured out the train story in my mathematics tutoring at the cocktail party. I have yet to “figure out” the dynamics of relationship of God and people. Today’s Gospel, part of Jesus’ high priestly prayer on behalf of the believers he leaves behind at the Ascension, contains those elements. However, there is one part of the Gospel that does not leave me confused or in the dark.

Jesus said that we are all one, both those who believed at the time of his earthly pilgrimage and the ones who will believe later. They had issues with inclusivity. What about non-Jews being Christian? What about keeping kosher, knowing the law, circumcision requirements and baptism? What constitutes welcoming and is there any space at all for regarding anyone as less than part of the greater community? They had issues.

We have issues. Please don’t think that I don’t have issues and I can observe and hear myself doing and saying things that are laced with indifference, insensitivity and any of several ‘-isms’ that are borne of bad learning and reinforced with fear.

We have issues with pedophilia in the ranks of clergy of all denominations. How can we exhibit grace to both the victim and the perpetrator? Isn’t easier to hate the one we don’t understand or one that we fear?

We have issues with race and equality and inclusivity in this country. If you don’t believe this, listen to discussions about the new laws in Arizona. Wholesale categorizing of Mexican people as drug-runners,

calling them the scum of the earth criminals who want to suck the lifeblood out of border states are not fact-based assumptions, they are fear-based assumptions.

Wholesale use of labels or damaging epithets based in fear and exclusion has no room in this inn. As a denomination and as a congregation, we do not agree with, we do not encourage and we do not condone statements that are racist, sexist or homophobic. We don't approve of or hold in esteem pronouncements that do anything less than honor Christ in all persons.

Do we fall short of these standards? Yes, we do. Do we say the wrong things and feel badly or proudly that we've said them? Yes, we do. Is this sin? Yes, it is. It is a sin because it divides us from God and each other. It breaks relationships and ruins reputations. It perpetuates lies and fears and anger. This sin of exclusivity and labeling removes us from being and becoming the trust-building, loving and generous work community we are called to be.

God has called us to be one. We may not understand how that story problem will work itself out, but I know our work of honoring all people as if they, each of them, is Jesus himself, would go a long way to healing the divide. We need to bind the wounds, not create them. We would have more energy for the work God has given us to do and make us a better example of the Kingdom of God in the midst of a troubled world.