

In case you don't know who I am, I am the strange boy that spends way too much time in church, sings way too loudly and off-key, wears an outfit that is way too intimidating for a person of my rank, bows and crosses himself way too many times, and – need I even mention, wears a hat that is way too funny for church. I am the verger of Christ & Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and I am responsible for assisting the clergy in shepherding the lay participants through our liturgies.

This September marks the beginning of my tenth year as a parishioner here. I was not born an Episcopalian, indeed I was not born a Christian; this is my first spiritual home and so it is with a heavy heart that I bid it farewell, at least for now. In October I will take up a place reading for a Bachelor of Arts in Theology in St. Benet's Hall at Oxford University, a prospect that leaves me exceedingly excited and mildly scared. And although I will be studying for a purely academic degree, I have been driven to pursue such extensive theological inquiry, not because of mere intellectual curiosity, but because of an abiding hope that by living out faith we might come to see God and His Creation more clearly. And what is this outward living of faith? I think it might best be called ministry. But ministry is more than helping our neighbor, it is God's promise that we will see and experience Him when we take up God's own path of service, humility, sacrifice, and even suffering for the love of even the least among us. Despite the limits of our human minds, we will come to know him in a manner that is wholly real and in a way that is not altogether foreign to our being.

One of the greatest aspects of our faith is the belief in God's mysterious incarnation. For us God is not just a distant being, he is also a real, even tangible, presence. As Jesus, God made himself known to us in our own bodily form so that we might be empowered by Christ Jesus' sacrifice and inspired by his example. Though the belief that God revealed himself in our own humanity, a humanity which has so often sought to dominate, destroy, and degradate its fellow man, is often difficult to understand, it is the fundamental testament of Christianity.

In this morning's reading from Mark's gospel, Jesus describes himself as the "Son of Man" who is "to be betrayed into human hands." In this seemingly paradoxical statement Jesus describes God's relationship with humanity. As the "Son of Man" Jesus is mortal, like us he is the son of Adam; also, Jesus describes himself as a son of heaven by alluding to a vision of the prophet Daniel that one "like the son of man" would come from heaven and "to him would be given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." Furthermore, Jesus emphasizes his own divinity by adding "betrayed *into human hands*."

The contemplation of the divine and human natures of Christ, or Christology, is a rather confusing concept. Like the Trinity and other articles of our faith, I doubt it is one any of us are meant to fully understand. One might spend a lifetime only to scratch the surface of the mystery of the Incarnate God.

And it is not just us that are left confounded two-thousand years later, Jesus' first disciples are left equally daunted by who their own Master is. They too are afraid, especially when Jesus goes on to say that he must be killed. Did not Daniel prophesy that the Son of Man "would be given dominion and glory and kingdom?" Certainly death and rejection were not part of that Messianic vision. Perhaps our faith is in vain, not only will we not be able to understand Christ the Lord, we will not be able to see him *as Lord*.

Confronted by increasing doubt and disappointment, the disciples begin to argue about who amongst them is greatest. And what Mark's Gospel does not say is that they never resolved that dispute. Indeed, dispute about who is greatest amongst Jesus' followers has lasted until the present day setting Apostle against Apostle, Pope against Emperor, Archbishop against King, and – even in today's Anglican Communion – Bishop against Bishop. As James says in this morning's Epistle, these conflicts are not caused by wisdom from above, but from our own earthly insecurities. "You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts." Ultimately what we want and covet is the peace of God; yet, we forget that the way to eternal life is the way of the cross, the way of doubt, suffering, rejection and death. Jesus tells us in the previous chapter "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." But this morning's gospel reading does not end with such a dismal lesson; instead, Christ offers humanity a way to experience an immediate foretaste of His kingdom.

Jesus instructs his disciples that "whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." This is the church's mission: to uplift the least amongst us by making ourselves their servants and in doing so heal a world hurt by the injustices of pride. "For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind," but where there is Christly purity, gentleness, and a willingness to yield, there will be "a harvest of righteousness sown in peace for us who make peace." And this is no mere platitude. Jesus emphasizes the reality of this call to ministry by lovingly taking a child, vulnerable and in its infancy, into his arms and saying to his followers, "whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." Thus, ministry is more than a philosophy on how to live a better life – it is a way through which we might come to see and know God.

For the past ten years I have seen ministers at work in this place and for the past ten years I have seen God at work. I have seen Him serve Vienna Fingers in the parish hall, I have seen Him in the sacristy preparing the Eucharistic elements, I have seen Him greet strangers in the narthex, I have seen Him heal the sick, I have seen Him teach fourth-graders in a class room and indeed it should be noted that my first lesson in theological inquiry was not with an Oxford don, but with a church-school teacher, I have seen Him in our Rector, and, most especially, I have seen Him on the Altar sacrificed for us that we might live as one, redeemed in His love and mindful of His presence all the days of our lives.

I would ask that before you leave Church that you explore the many possible outlets for ministry. And it should be noted that ministry extends far beyond Sunday morning worship and indeed far beyond the walls of this building. At Christ & Holy Trinity we take seriously our great commission to go forth into the world. Whether feeding and clothing the hungry on the streets of New York, or building homes on the Mississippi bayou, there is an abundance of opportunities beyond those of Sunday worship. I am telling the truth when I say that our church offers something for everyone. Ministry is not just for the aspiring acolyte or the patient Sunday school teacher, it is for every variety of person. As GK Chesterton writes, "Every man is a man before he is a saint; and a saint may be made of every sort or kind of man; and most of us will choose to be different types of saints according to our different tastes."

When we welcome others in the love, service, and spirit of Christ, we welcome God into our lives and into the lives of others. In this way we re-affirm and experience the reality of the Incarnate God who took upon his divine self our human nature so that he might draw near to us, and we to him. Amen.