

Rev. George Arceneaux

3.17.2024

Fifth Sunday in Lent

This past Sunday, the youth of St. Christopher's did something truly spectacular. They created the greatest title of a church youth group that has ever, and perhaps WILL ever exist, complete with special group crossing of one's self. They are "The Episco-SLAYians." Them coming up with this name and showing as much excitement as they did has made me so, so happy. And yet, I couldn't help but think about how some churches, past and present, might react to such a display of joy that is... at least to my mind, a little different from what many churches have thought about when it comes to church youth.

I think this is because of this season of Lent, ostensibly dour and so focused on our mortality. You know... that cheery fact that we're all gonna die some day. To have the Episco-SLAYians emerge in this season feels to my mind, formed by a history of churchgoing and the notion of kids being seen not heard, the Episco-SLAYians is the sort of thing a number of folks might shutdown or say is totally opposed to what Jesus would want.

But if anything, I think our readings today remind us that the season of Lent is not meant to be dour or grave for that sake alone. It's a season to remind us that even though we live in a world where we are dust and to dust we shall return, our God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living, and one I very much believe thinks this new youth group moniker is about as good as it gets for 2024.

There's a temptation to get stuck in life. To assume that church SHOULD look a certain way. I know I am a victim of this, I can't tell you how many times I have said the Lord's Prayer or

the Nicene Creed or heard the Eucharistic prayer said by some priest and just gone through the motions without any mindfulness of what I'm saying. I think we can get so stuck in a way of thinking and can get stuck in more significant ways that just rattling of the lords prayer. We can be stuck in thinking we're trapped by our mistakes and that we're doomed to repeat them again and again. We can look out into a world that seems unable to be better, look to those we love or perhaps even those we don't and simply assume things about them.

But today's readings say no, the miracle of God is that life is always new, always changing, and that we are always called to wake from our slumber of routine and assumption, especially in Lent, to the wonders of every day. The serious version of this is that word from Jesus that even though a seed of wheat may fall into the earth and die, it produces much fruit. The notion that, as we and all things may die, life is changed, not ended.

Now I say that was the somewhat more serious reading about this idea of not staying stuck but seeing the ways in which we can be surprised even unto a dead seed producing life.... Look I kinda guffawed when I read the Jeremiah reading. Now remember, Jeremiah is the lamenting prophet, this is the guy who says, "The LORD will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. Do not pray for the welfare of this people!" and "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, desperately wicked. Who can understand it?"

Jeremiah is, to my mind generally speaking, not an upbeat kinda guy. And yet from this same man we hear this morning:

"this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

The notion that God will always be there for people; that the law of love is written on their hearts.

On yours and on mine. That is not what I expected from Jeremiah.

I didn't know what to expect from the youth group, but assumed it would not be the EPISCOslayians. When I got here around 6 months ago, I didn't know exactly what church events might look like but in week two or three a bunch of kids said "Taylor Swift Night" and this past

Thursday we had a gaggle of families rocking to the Eras tour. I never thought that I'd celebrate at the 8AM service in the style of the New Zealand Prayer Book or celebrate the 11AM in Rite I. I certainly didn't expect to be back at this church after years away.

But that's one of the great gifts of God. That even when we believe something impossible, the unexpected can always happen. As we wind down in Lent and prepare for Holy Week, I pray we have the humility to know amazing things will happen, especially when stuck believing the world is a certain old way.