

**Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio  
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

**“When love is the way,  
there’s plenty good room-  
plenty good room-  
for all of God’s children!”**

***“When love is the way, there’s plenty good room- plenty good room for all God’s children!”*** No doubt you will recognize the words of our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, as he challenges the church to follow in the way of Jesus! In fact, I bought the tee shirt that bears those words on the front.

As some of you may know, I came home from the General Convention of the Episcopal Church on Wednesday night after four exciting days in Austin with several thousand other Episcopalians. As I sat on Wednesday at a table at Gus’ World Famous Fried Chicken Restaurant, a twenty-something young man and woman leaned over to me and said, “What’s going on in Austin with all you priests running around?” As I shared a nervous laugh with him, I found myself saying, “It’s our General Convention and we are celebrating the Way of Love, the Way of Jesus!” To which he replied, “I hope it works!”

The Way of Love, the Way of Jesus... This General Convention was my third one. I attended the Philadelphia Convention where the Westboro Baptist Church protested in the streets of Philadelphia every day as Bishop Gene Robinson took his place in the House of Bishops. The signs they held were vile and expressed the antithesis of Bishop Michael Curry’s message of Jesus’ all-inclusive love. It was a tumultuous convention as bishops, deputies, and other members of the Episcopal Church desperately tried to hold onto God’s mission of reconciliation and restoration in the midst of broken hearts and destructive, divisive rhetoric taking its toll on our church family.

I attended the General Convention in Columbus and was in the House of Bishops in the visitors’ gallery as the Bishops filed in having elected a new Presiding Bishop for our Church. Four thousand plus Episcopalians, media outlets, security and others stood and sat in absolute silence as we watched the bishops file in and take their seats. Silence. Total silence filled the room. You could, however, nearly hear the rhythm of nervous heart beats float in the air as the announcement was made that The Right Reverend Kathryn Jerfferts Schori was the new Presiding Bishop Elect. As gasps filled the room, the tears began to flow, and as the tears began to flow, people held each other and sobbed. It was a sight I will never forget. It was an experience of the church, I long to remember for I am quite certain that in those moments those who vehemently opposed a woman as a Presiding Bishop and those who longed for the possibility of a female Presiding Bishop, held each other in a

compassionate embrace. No one asked of the other sobbing person, why are you crying? The fact we were all crying was sufficient to open wide our arms, and I believe, our hearts... to what new thing the Spirit had done in our midst.

Such work of the Spirit continues! It continued in the election of The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church some three years ago. And I dare say, the work of the Spirit is powerfully transforming us even now, in the midst of these tumultuous days.

Today, the readings are ones I chose before going to General Convention. I chose them because I needed a reminder, an assurance, perhaps, that the Spirit works in times like the ones in which we find ourselves, right now.

I needed, and perhaps you do, too, to be reminded, to be challenged, to be held accountable for setting our hearts to believing that the

*“home of God is among mortals... that God dwells with us... and we will be God’s people, and God will forever be with us. That God wipes every tear from our eyes... that death will be no more... mourning, crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away...”*

Don’t you need to take those words to your heart? Don’t you need to let them sink in slowly, deeply, mysteriously taking up all the space in your heart where you have stuffed down all the pain, all the fear, all the anger, all the resentment, all the aching disappointment that can and often does hold your heart hostage? Where we give up and give into reactive, repulsive, regurgitations of judgmental, disrespectful, destructive patterns of speech and behavior. My friends, it is time to STOP giving ourselves permission to become that which we so vehemently abhor in others!

This seventy-ninth General Convention of the Episcopal Church, our beloved Church, was sufficiently different in tone and behavior as our Presiding Bishop’s call to arms is a call to open wide our arms to an inclusive embrace of love and acceptance of all God’s children as we also become more committed stewards of God’s holy creation.

Yes, this was a different convention, indeed, where Bishops and Deputies did not shout each other down in disagreement but found respectful, dignified ways to disagree and to compromise. Do you remember the power of compromise to work on behalf of the common good? This church, our church, the Episcopal Church found its way, mostly, back to the virtue of respecting the dignity of every human being, loving our neighbors as our very selves. What a timely witness to this broken world!

And I learned a lot about asking forgiveness, being forgiven, and reconciling anew. You see, fifty-two years ago, at General Convention, during the Cuban Revolution, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, voted to expel La Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba from the body of the whole Episcopal Church. It was a sinful, politically

motivated move by the Bishops and resulted in extraordinary isolation and pain for the Episcopal Church in Cuba. No longer were they a part of our body... no longer did we even care to offer a hand, a prayer, a caring gesture their way, in what was a long painful exile.

And yet, the Church in Cuba did not die. It did not resign itself to the status of an unwelcome sister church. Instead, with the assistance of the Anglican Church in Canada, our sister church in Cuba, grew in grace, grew in strength, grew in numbers. And over the last three years, having consulted with Presiding Bishop Michael, they fulfilled every criteria set forth by the Episcopal Church for re-acceptance into our body once again.

On the floor of the House of Bishops, we heard the testimonies of Episcopal Bishops, native Cubans, cry with the pain of separation that these 52 years have brought. We heard the testimony of others who have visited Cuba and witnessed a vital, Spirit-filled people of faith in Jesus Christ, following in the way of Jesus, and praying to be re-united with their spiritual family.

Our Bishops asked forgiveness. The House of Bishops admitted the sin and evil of that decision to expel La Iglesia de Cuba from our body and voted along with the House of Deputies to welcome them home with love and joy, our Cuban sisters and brothers of the Episcopal Church.

Presiding Bishop Curry called Bishop Griselda (woman, Bishop of the Church of Cuba) to come forward address her brother and sister bishops and then take her place at the table in the House of Bishops. The same thing happened in the House of Deputies.

The huge halls of the Austin Convention center were filled with shouts of joy and tears of reconciling love. Love is the way, the only way. And the Episcopal Church in a moment of humility, hope, reconciliation and healing, witnessed such love to the world.

In other matters, new things were accomplished. Compromises abounded and in all things... Love led the way.

Our Gospel today recounts the exhaustion, exasperation, and exuberance of the disciples as they learn to follow the way of Jesus. Seeking only to fish in the way they have always done it, they cannot catch a single fish in the net. Surrendering their old, tired, worn, and unsuccessful way, they listen to Jesus and cast their net "on the other side" and lo and behold, they are so overwhelmed by the amount of fish in their nets, they called on their partners in the other boat for help!

I suspect that you and I, political and religious leaders of our time are in need of reflecting on the message of this particular gospel. It is time to take our well-worn heels out of the sand in which we have long dug them in, learn new ways of respect

and compromise, partnership and mutual affection, and seek only that which serves the *common* good.

Jesus says to Simon... "Do not be afraid." To us, Jesus says, surrender to me. Surrender to the way of love. "Do not be afraid."

On the back of my new tee shirt, are these words...

**LOVING**

**LIBERATING**

**LIFEGIVING**

*The Jesus Movement*

Will you follow in the way of Jesus? Will you surrender old ways of being, knowing, judging, behaving, praying, deciding,?

*How will you choose to witness...*

*When love is the way,*

*there's plenty good room-*

*plenty good room-*

*for all of God's children???*

*Amen.*