

The Crooked Will Be Straight and the Rough Ways Smooth
50th Anniversary Worship Service,
12/9/18, Robert Woody

Thanks to all of you for joining us to celebrate our 50th Anniversary as the Church of Reconciliation. We are so blessed to have so many of our former clergy and former members join us for our celebration last night and for today's worship celebration.

And I have to say another Thanksgiving to Brenda Moneer, and her team, for preparing a wonderful dinner last night.

Ironically, the assigned Advent readings for this Sunday seem to fit and resonate very well with what I see as the history and DNA of Rec, **and** they point us to our future. From our Old Testament reading:

"For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel **may walk safely** in the glory of God."

And from our Gospel, Luke quoting from Isaiah:

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and **all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**'"

And from Paul's letter to the Philippians,

Paul prays "that your love may **overflow** more and more
with knowledge and full insight"

When I think of the DNA and history of Rec, I think about all the ways we have made **welcoming pathways** for those who have been excluded and not welcomed by the Church and our society. We have created pathways; we have made the crooked ways straight, we have smoothed the road so those being left out would be able to join us. We have let our love overflow and overcome difficult situations.

1968, the year of our birth, was a difficult and chaotic time in our world. Joe Brown clearly saw that the Church needed to change. We opened up and made walkable pathways, first, for Vietnam Vets who were having Church doors slammed in their face. Then we welcomed creative artists, who didn't always see God and Christ and Creation through the traditional Christian lens, to join us and share their gifts of creativity. (*We are honoring our creative artist with all the awesome stoles hanging on the stairs that they made over the years.*)

We started having 2nd Sundays so we could hear the voice of God through people who didn't wear collars. We were the first church in San Antonio to welcome and open

a pathway for 12 Steppers to meet on our campus, who were also having Church doors slammed in their faces. We welcomed divorcees, who, like me, were being kicked out of Churches, to join us. We welcomed and embraced some of the first female priests in the diocese.

More recently, we welcomed the LGBTQ community. We carved the pathway for them to be married in the church. And we welcomed the developmentally disabled adults, RMI, to become an active part of our faith community.

And because we made the crooked and rough pathways straight and walkable for those who were excluded or left behind, we were **all blessed** to know and experience how abundant and inclusive the Love of God really is. We realized that God's love is bigger and more inclusive than anything we would ever have been able to imagine, if we had all stayed in the narrow worlds we grew up in. Because Reconciliation was willing to stretch and grow, we have been able to love **many people** who were being excluded by the Church.

I am so proud of the many ways we as Reconcilers have made the crooked, windy and difficult pathways straight and safe and level and loving for so many groups who were excluded.

But we are not here to just celebrate our wonderful **past**. We are here to continue to **discern** and **celebrate** our **DNA**, so that we can find ways to continue to apply our DNA to a rapidly changing world.

How can our DNA of the past 50 years be applied to a **very** challenging future? How do we continue to be a place of reconciliation and love for the **next 50 years**?

We are not finished in our **stretching** to love **all** our neighbors.

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 9, 2018
The Episcopal Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio, TX
The Rev. Craig MacColl

Robert and Jane have both celebrated how Reconciliation has created pathways for those who have felt excluded or marginalized by the church. And Robert has pointed out that Advent is a time for us to reflect on how, in the dark and uncertain times of life, God is often clearing a straight path for us to know and see God's saving and liberating love and grace in action. But I'd like to conclude this morning by saying that the season of Advent also reminds us that the path from the present to the future is hardly ever a straight line. The lessons for Advent challenge us to remember that the life of faith is often full of unexpected twists and surprising turns.

No one knew this better than St. Paul. Beginning with his mysterious, baffling conversion on the road to Damascus, to his life as a missionary in Greece and Asia Minor. On this

second Sunday of Advent, we heard Paul thank the Philippians for holding him in their prayers while he is in prison. Paul's future is uncertain. He faces the real possibility of being executed or dying while in jail. And yet he shows no fear of death. He writes that to live means freedom to labor for Christ while to die means that he will be with Christ.

At the same time, Paul knows that despite his confidence about the future, the path to the future is not made straight by our achievements, our good deeds, our education, or our standing in the community. Nonetheless, he says that we can find the resilience to persist regardless of circumstances, by means of our faith. For Paul, "faith" means our trust in Christ, our trust in our relationship with God, and our trust in our relationships with others. It is this resilience, sustained by faith and faithfulness, which gives Paul confidence as he journeys towards the future.

What does the path forward look like for the Church of Reconciliation? How will you continue to prepare yourselves to engage the diversity and fault-lines of the culture around us now? Our country is currently undergoing what many have described as an erosion of kindness, civility and respect for those we disagree with or for those we have little in common with. When we say "welcome" does this only mean that we engage with people in order to discover what we have in common with them?

This past week Jane shared with me a story from several years ago about a Bible study group made up of women from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian community. As the group progressed, the Jewish and Christian women discovered how much they had in common when it came to interpreting the Bible. But the group ran into a road-block when the Muslim women found the courage to explain that they could not interpret the Koran, their sacred book, in the same way. How would the group proceed? Could the group's future include the possibility that they could care for and support each other even though there would continue to be a fundamental disagreement about how to interpret sacred scripture?

These are challenging times. The tensions and divisions in America today are a strong reminder of the tensions and divisions that occurred in 1968 when the Church of Reconciliation was founded. Does the current climate invite us to move beyond finding what we have in common with strangers to being held together in faith and trust with people we may never fully understand or agree with? As a community, how will the Church of Reconciliation continue to cultivate the kind of resilience in faith that Paul points to?

Recently, I discovered an old post card that has on its face a quote from the famous comedienne Gracie Allen, the other half of the Burns and Allen comedy duo from the 1960's. It says, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma." The path from the present to the future is not a straight line. My hope for you all is that as you celebrate your wonderful past as a welcoming, inclusive congregation, this won't be a time to put periods

where God may be inviting you to put commas, a time to celebrate how God may be shaping and molding you over time to be resilient in your faith.... Resilient enough to help create a new era of civility, kindness and respect in a world that waits in darkness for the coming of Christ. Amen.