

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

I've been struck by the amount of sloppy rhetoric in the world right now. From French footballers arguing with their coach to BP executives putting both feet firmly in their mouths we've witnessed some unfortunate incidents. And as General McChrystal can testify none of us should underestimate the power of language. I'd like to think that the church is above such petty contretemps, but alas as you well know the opposite is true. From the news that our Presiding Bishop was asked not to wear her miter on a visit to England to the announcement that the Episcopal Church has been asked to step back from full participation in the Anglican Communion the last few weeks have also been rhetorically fairly volatile within our worldwide Anglican Communion.

Today's scripture readings remind us that such volatility has been a constant presence within the Christian church. It is for this reason we are told rather forcefully in Paul's little lecture to the Galatians just what the fruits of the Spirit do not include. Paul encourages the church of his day not just to avoid serious failures such as fornication, licentiousness and sorcery, but also to steer clear of more everyday failings such as anger, quarrels, dissensions and factions. Although there is no way Paul could know what it would be like to be a twenty-first century church, once you skip the bit about sorcery his litany of church failings has a timeless and curiously contemporary ring to it.

Against the backdrop of all this human wrangling it is easy to be dispirited and demoralized. It is also easy to get sucked into the vortex of name calling and scapegoating that so often surrounds normal human conflict. Right now I would not want to be a French footballer or a BP oil executive for all the tea in China. While legitimate criticism is a healthy part of social debate, many of our most public conflicts seem to enjoy the sport of character assassination more than debating the relevant issues. To be clear, I don't

think the French team should have walked out, and I don't endorse the oil spill. But it does strike me as curious how we focus in on the French rather than say the more than ample silliness of other soccer teams; and, again, one wonders why the zeroing in on BP alone rather than engaging critically with Haliburton, Transocean, oil dependence and the regulatory environment that enabled the spill to happen.

In our Gospel the disciples are agitated by the way a Samaritan village rejects Jesus. They want revenge. And to judge from the reading, it is pretty clear they are talking about blood. It is not exactly the behavior we were led to expect from followers of the Prince of Peace, and it is clear from Jesus that such a response is unacceptable. Instead Jesus points them to directing their energies not backwards to past mistakes and hurts, but forwards.

Right now I believe that God is calling the Christian church forwards. Forwards to a spirit of genuine inclusion for all people, regardless of their skin color, nationality or gender. Forwards into a broader and more open communion where every child of God is a full participant, regardless of age, sexuality, class or social status. At the moment the church is on the cusp of being a genuinely inclusive instrument of God's love and compassion. But we are not there yet. Not by a long shot. And the current wrangling within the Anglican Communion remind us that there are many who have no concept of what it might mean to talk about God's all inclusive love.

At the same time, we do well to remind ourselves that the current controversies dividing Canterbury from Washington, or New Hampshire from Nigeria are not as simple as we are being led to believe. One of the historic strengths of Anglicanism has been how good it has been at adapting to local and cultural differences. From its English origins the Prayer Book has been translated into dozens of languages, and with passing generations those Prayer Books have in turn been revised to incorporate new understandings about human identity.

Which brings us to one of the heart of the matter. Jesus tells his disciples in no uncertain terms that the best direction for their energy is forwards not backwards. And to illustrate this, we are told how Jesus himself turns his face towards Jerusalem. I wonder what it might mean today to do something similar. Is it forward looking to direct our attention back to Anglican wrangling? And is it backward looking to direct our attention to bringing the gospel of inclusion to those who have not yet heard it that way? I think not.

As individuals God is not calling us to perfect our church. Although, to be honest, there is a lot of perfecting that needs to be done. No. God is calling us to perfect our world through the medium of the church. And like the world the church is broken. If the church were not broken we would not need the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and the mystery of the Eucharist. But the church is broken. Very broken.

If we are in our own day ever to be able to turn our own faces towards Jerusalem we need to be reminded that the brokenness of the church will always be a constant. For what is the church but the people of God? And what are the people of God if not the community of different people who recognize their own brokenness and seek healing and wholeness?

I preach to you this morning, as indeed every time I preach or celebrate the sacraments, not as someone who has superior knowledge or a perfected faith. Rather, I come before you first as someone who is a sinner, someone who is broken, someone who knows that he does not 'get' everything. Some of the time I like to think that I do get more than the odd thing right. But I also know that there is a not inconsiderable gulf between how God desires me to be and who I really am.

Let me be clear, I am not saying that we should all bare our chests and bemoan our sins because there is nothing to be done. What I am saying, is that there is plenty to be done. And the work starts not somewhere else.

The work starts right here, right now, within each and every one of us. It is always easy to see where others need to change. What is less easy is looking within.

Jesus, of course, seemed exceptionally uninterested in telling others what to do. And if we are ever to become more than just another cultural association, the church also needs to concentrate more on turning toward Jerusalem and less on taking pot shots at others. Now only you know what it means to turn towards Jerusalem for yourself. And only you can do it. But I strongly suspect that in turning toward Jerusalem we will each find ourselves turning away from anger, quarrels, dissensions and factions. God is already calling us into a brave new world. All that remains to be seen is whether we are ready to respond to that call. Rhetoric of recrimination and name calling may be self-satisfying and cathartic but it rarely gets us closer to Jerusalem. Instead, God wants us to discover the rhetoric and the actions that will help us love others without exception. Amen.