



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

August 30, 2009

Pentecost 13 2009

This past Thursday night Ben Harper and I rode to Danville. We had been assigned to referee a high school soccer game together. When we got to the ground one of the first things we needed to find out was the color shirt that each team was playing in. You see unlike officials in other sports where officials only need one kind of shirt, soccer referees have to carry a wardrobe of different color shirts. The standard color is yellow, but if a team is playing in yellow we have to change. Our secondary color is black then red then blue and last year we added green to our collection.

We do this because we have to be distinguished from the players. We have to be seen, we have to be different and of course the supporters need to know who to yell at.

We wear a uniform and on the field it defines who we are, separates us from the players and tells what function we perform.

When we decide to follow Christ and in our life as followers of Christ, we are not given special clothes so that people will see us and know we are Christian. When we are baptized the cross that is signed on our forehead does not glow and let people know we are Christian. We are not asked to walk funny, or have special signs to one another. In fact we are not asked to have anything outward that will tell others we are followers of Christ. But we are expected in our outward living to be different because of who we are on the inside.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Jesus talks today about those who would appear to be living by god's commands but are not. On the outside they look and act incredibly holy and righteous and they eat and drink all the right stuff. But that is not what is important says Jesus. It is what is truly inside of you that are important. Because it is what is inside of you, what is in your heart that determines who you are, and is reflected in the way you live. And how you live becomes your uniform that people see. Our lips may say all the right things but our hearts are probably nowhere near where god wants them to be.

So how do we begin to change our hearts? How do we make stronger the qualities that Jesus asks for? How do we change the list that Jesus gives us today into compassion, kindness, gentleness, mercy, forgiveness and love?

I think it is Paul that gives us a clue in moving closer to how Jesus is calling us to be in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul says be strong in the lord and in the strength of his power.

The word strength has a Latin root that means to twist together, or to bind tightly. Like a cord or a rope the more threads or strands woven together the stronger the cord. Paul tells us of the inner strength we must nurture in our binding ourselves to Christ and then to one another.

What he is saying is that when our lives become more and more intertwined with god, the more that we begin to change our hearts to a godly way of thinking, the more reflective of god we become in our living. Our uniform begins to show.

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Paul calls it armor. Armor is outward clothing and it is used to protect. What Paul is saying is that when you change what is on the inside, you reflect who God wants you to be, and that in itself guards you from ungodly stuff. The stronger we become in our godly living, the more protected we become from the temptations to ungodly living.

And Paul begins with truth. Truth. One of the major themes of Jesus' ministry was truth. All of us at some time in our lives have been less than truthful. All of us know that the consequences of being less truthful is usually that someone else gets blamed, people get hurt, and it usually comes back to bite us. Not to even mention the guilt we feel.

Honesty is the best policy so be truthful. Not only to tell the truth, but I believe also to look for truth in every situation. Do not just accept what you are told. Look for the truth.

Righteousness- righteousness is translated from the same word as integrity. To be a follower of Christ is to incorporate integrity into our lives in every situation we find ourselves in so that becomes second nature to always choose the honest way. To have integrity. You know I think integrity is always the greatest protection against the problems and consequences that come with dishonesty and cheating.

Courage-to proclaim the gospel of peace

Faith-to know that God is with you at all times

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Encouragement- from the words of god

Pray. Be prayerful about everything. Every choice every decision we make. Hold in prayer every person we meet knowing that not only are we the instruments of god, but that the person we are talking to is a child of god.

Truth, integrity, proclamation, courage, faith, prayer. All of them cords that we are asked to intertwine every minute of our life so that our strength grows in god. You know when you think of all that Paul said today there is no protection for your back. It is because we cannot change anything that has already happened. But we can control what happens today and when we strengthen the inside with god, our uniform will be seen. We will be distinguished from others as our life will be reflective of a heart

Intertwined with god.

Amen

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