

Proper 16  
Year A 2020  
Matthew 16:13-20

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

As I was working with today's texts an image came to me.

An image of something I normally see every week.

An image that looks at me  
as I stand out front at the bottom of the stairs  
greeting all of you after our service.

It is the stone that is set into the front of the church.

In the left corner of the church front,  
right about eye level,  
as you begin to climb the stairs into church.

It has a cross and the year 1908 carved into it.

It is, at least for me,  
the rock which symbolizes  
not just this physical church,  
but the community which was built here 112 years ago.

Isaiah exhorts:

“Look to the rock from which you were hewn  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.”

Isaiah calls the people to remember their heritage.

To know their identity as the people of God  
and to preserve that identity into the future.

He reminds them of God’s faithfulness  
since the blessing of Abraham and Sarah.

Of the many ways in which God  
has turned the most chaotic, hurtful,  
and destructive into paradise.

A reminder of God’s transforming power  
as justice is revealed as a light to the peoples.

This proclamation from Isaiah  
serves to remind the people of God  
of the foundation from which they were hewn  
and of their hope in God.

Isaiah is speaking to the people who  
pursue righteousness as they seek evidence  
of God in the midst of their world.

As they seek righteousness  
which is defined as justice in Deuteronomy (16:20):

Justice only justice you shall pursue.....

In the Letter to the Roman's,  
Paul appeals to the church in Rome  
to present themselves as a living sacrifice.

This is a communal act lived out  
not just a set of beliefs or statements.

As one body with many gifts,  
the community engages in daily acts  
as the manner in which they give praise to God.

They are urged not to conform to this world,  
the world of injustice but, rather,  
to be transformed.

To engage in the metamorphosis of lives  
which show forth the righteousness of God.

Offering their bodies, their very selves, as a sacrifice.

The sacrifice of determining to live in a different reality.

The reality in which lives are lived  
not in support of a political group,  
the human made power structures,  
nor the institutions which serve up injustice daily.

As commentator Joy Moore says:

Instead, to live lives which are a reasonable response to God's mercy and grace.

To show forth a different way that God is in the world.

Jesus asks the disciples gathered with him in the district of Caesarea Philippi:

“But who do **you** say that I am?”

In essence,

Are you willing to stake your life on belief in the Messiah, the Son of the living God?

Are you, you all, willing to stake your lives on transforming the world?

Of openly showing that you live lives which show forth a different allegiance?

Forming communities which will pursue righteousness?

Communities that will work bring about justice?

Communities that will not just rely on credal statements but whose lives will show forth a different reality to a world held hostage by power, greed, narcissism and hate.

Since 1908, over the course of 112 years,  
the community of St. Andrew's has inhabited this space.

Our forebears have engaged the neighborhood,  
city and world beyond these doors  
offering their bodies, their very selves, as a living sacrifice.

The sacrifice of determining to live in a different reality.

A reality in which hungry children were fed;  
young men who refused to take up arms were sheltered;  
those who knew only ostracism as the result of  
contracting a disease were comforted;  
children in need gained access to quality education;  
and women whose lives were on the line  
each and every day due to lack of shelter were made safe,  
for a few hours.

The members of the community of St. Andrew's,  
over the course of 112 years,  
have gathered among this collection of rocks each week,  
as do we here today,  
to reaffirm the transformative power  
of God's mercy and grace in acts of justice.

Just as during the times of the communities  
we hear from in Scripture today,  
the world was and is a mess.

There is chaos, famine,  
drought, war,  
and the powerful make their gains  
at the expense of the most vulnerable.

We have before us, in our time,  
the opportunity to show forth in our actions  
that we are willing to stake our lives on Jesus.

That we are willing to choose justice.

That we are dedicated to transforming  
this world into the Kingdom of God.

That on this rock,  
the hungry, the ill,  
the needy, the powerless, the vulnerable,  
have a community that will fight for justice.

That on this rock,  
this community will show forth  
a different way that God is in the world.

That on this rock, this community shows forth  
a reasonable response to God's mercy and grace.