

Rappahannock Christian Church – 5-11-08
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur – Pastor

Celebrating 150 Years of Worship in Our Sanctuary
Guest Speaker: Rev. Edward Parrish III

Communion Meditation

Have you ever gone into a room and not been able to remember what you went there for? Ever forgot about an appointment or to pay a bill on time?

We are all just so prone to forgetting. It's human, I suppose. Sometimes it seems like our brain just comes untied.

I think that Jesus knew that it would be so easy for us to forget and become distracted. He told us that we should come together often to take Bread and Cup and that whenever we do that we should remember that He died for us in great love. I'm SO glad that He had the foresight to give us this instruction!

Right now, as we take this Bread and Cup, let's put all those distractions away and only remember that Jesus loves us and this is what He told us to do. Let me read the words of the Apostle Paul for you from 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We Have This Treasure - Rev. Edward Parrish III

Each week when we say "Yes" to come into the house of the Lord we are aware of many different authorities that govern the things of this world but we choose to submit ourselves to the Higher Authority.

Today's Scripture reading comes from 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 NRSV

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

We have this treasure!

We have this treasure ...so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies – our mortal flesh!!

The “Rapture” happened yesterday. May 21, 2011, at 6 PM. It was supposed to be the end of the world. Do you remember where you were at that moment?

I remember where I was June 9, 1974. It was a Sunday; right here in this sanctuary. I had come to embody a formal commitment to Christian ministry. I had been “away” on my life journey for 8 years. I spent most of that in other sanctuaries on Sundays. Six of those years had been preaching & leading worship for other churches.

This time I have been away for 37 years. During those 37 years, one document has hung on the wall in my workspace. It says, “June 9, 1974, Rappahannock Christian Church, Dunnsville, Virginia.” It is my certificate of ordination, of which I am *so* thankful for your participation. It is an honor to be invited back here ...to this sanctuary ...to remember... and to revisit that embodiment of commitment to ministry.

I’d like to begin this morning by taking a look at our Jewish heritage for a moment. In ancient times our spiritual fathers were frequently informed by an encounter with God. These encounters often took place out of doors. When that happened, the person would take a large, oblong stone that was nearby and set it up on end so that anyone passing by would see it and know that an encounter with God had taken place there and those who knew would tell the story of what had happened.

The forbearers of Rappahannock Christian Church “set up a stone” in this place. In fact they didn’t set up just one stone. They set many stones, stone upon stone, in a testimony to their faith and how they had gathered together and been transformed by the Spirit of God working in their midst. ... “We have this treasure” so that this faith of Jesus Christ may be seen in us. We are “living stones” in the testimony of His Church.

I so often relive the memories that I have of growing up here. Our recollections are not just thoughts. They are *our* story. Our memories are much of what make up our soul and give us identity. They are “who we are.”

- I remember my Sunday School teacher, Judge Dean Hundley and his family, Maury Sr. and Jr., and the girls. We met in a small room somewhere around here (maybe it was in his home). It was he who informed me so much about Bible study. Each week he would come to us with our lesson and he would have studied many other sources to enrich his teaching.
- I remember the deacons sitting up here on the side row and smiling. I remember that all the deacons bowed their heads and propped their elbows on their knees during prayer as a symbol of our submission to a Higher Authority.
- I remember working at Ware’s Store and Post Office. I just had to go and stick my head in one of the windows when we arrived this morning. In serving the residents and summer visitors there, I learned to show hospitality and service to all.
- My first real sermon was right here in this pulpit. I remember that one of the illustrations I used was a favorite one of mine. It is the story of how the Indian princess, Pocahontas, threw herself between Captain John Smith and his captors to save him from death.

- I remember staying with Joe and Lila Ware one summer while my parents were away. It was while kept in that community of faith that I borrowed Joe's guitar and learned my first chords. Later Peter Ware taught me some more of the "finer points."
- Then there was Agnes Ware. She was a great teacher and mentor to me. I so much enjoyed sitting on their porch and meeting with people from all parts of the world. Many of my thoughts were formed during those times.
- There was catching crabs off of Juliet Parker's pier with a chicken neck tied to a string. Is that the same way you still do it today?
- Then I remember learning to water ski behind Joe Ware's boat near Yorktown. The river was full of stinging nettles that day, but I was determined to learn so I endured the nettles until I mastered it. It's been a mantra of my life ever since, to endure until I can learn and do.
- I painted houses for Brooks and Elliot Construction, and learned responsibility and ethics in work.
- And I remember learning to drive the '49 Ford coupe that we had. I made a dirt track around the parsonage hill and drove it 'round and 'round until I could get the finer points down. Oh, life was good in those days!

These are some of the threads of my formation that I am grateful for. I really thank you for the part you-all played in seeing me through.

A book that has been both inspirational and formative for me is titled Sacred and Profane, by Mircea Eliade. Eliade says that humans seem to have "places" in their lives for things that are sacred (our parents, our family, our church) and those that are profane. There are also, he says, "transitional" spaces in between. These "transitional spaces" serve as "thresholds" and we have "rituals of passage" as we cross from the profane to the sacred spaces in our lives. For instance:

- We say, "Wipe your feet before coming into the house."
- "Take your hat off."
- We shake hands and welcome a newcomer to show hospitality,
- We put on special clothing for going to special places, like church.

I remember I always had a hard time with workdays at the church. No matter that I was in my crumby clothes, no matter what project we were doing, whenever I had to pass through the sanctuary I felt compelled to walk softly and take off my cap. There are just places that are "different." There is this tension between the "sacred" and the "profane." Church is a place where we learn about that reality and the differences and tensions between them.

This sanctuary has been "sacred space" for me for 47 years. How long has it been for each of you? I don't know. For the people of this community, Rappahannock Christian Church has been "sacred space" for 150 years.

But we don't worship this building. It is constructed of wood and bricks ...and clay. "We have this treasure" – the treasures of this building and these experiences in our lives – so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies and in our mortal flesh. ...So that we may become the "living stones" of witness for this community – for the world.

These experiences have become part of us. Our ancestors had an experience of God and they set up a stone – a building of clay stones – in this place so that we can remember and recollect our identity as “living stones.”

There is a Scripture that has a “so that” not present, but that I believe is strongly implied. (At times when reading the Scripture we will come across a place where the author says, “So that...” I believe that this is a place where we should pay special attention. By saying, “So that...” the author is alerting us that he is about to explain the meaning of what has happened just before.) In Luke 23:44-46 we have one of these implied “so that’s.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” [*Matthew and Mark note that it was torn from the top to the bottom. I think that this is a “so that” that we are to learn from.*] “Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”

The “curtain of the Temple” separated the holy places in and around the Temple and in all creation from “The Most Holy Place.” The curtain was supported by four wooden columns and made a square space in the heart of the Temple. Within the four curtain walls was placed “The Ark of the Covenant” which the Israelites carried through the wilderness and finally to Jerusalem. On top of the Ark of the Covenant was placed “The Mercy Seat” – the place on Earth where God was especially present. When Jesus died, this curtain tore in two from the top to the bottom. In Jesus’ death, the barrier before God was removed so that all creation might have free and open access to God.

In John 20:30 we are told, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The “so that” of any holy space is this belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and you may come, and we may become enabled to believe unto eternal life through Him.

This sanctuary with its beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God has been, and will be, an open portal between the sacred and the profane “so that” “...the life of Jesus may be made visible in the mortal flesh [of us and of the world].”

In the distresses and uncertainties of our own souls, actions, relationships, communities and nations, “the Treasure” continues to be a healthful, healing Treasure for all, despite its “earthen accommodations,” and we become living stones of witness in the community.

Benediction

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations. – Psalm 19:14