

St. John's Washington-July 12, 2020 Sermon - Dylan Mello

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good Morning Everyone!

I want to thank you all for having me here at St. John's on this summer morning! Since Covid-19 began, I have not been making as many Sunday preaching visits and its good to be back and here with you all both in person and online. A quick introduction, my name is Dylan and I have been on the job as Northwest Region Missionary for just over a year. Much of my job has included traveling throughout the Northwest Region of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and engaging with parishes, clergy, parishioners, community organizations, and more. My responsibilities are to connect, catalyze, collaborate, expand our own capabilities, and convene groups together. There are 28 churches and Camp Washington in our Region, and each group brings their own unique energy and abilities with them. This time of Covid-19 along with the movement to address racial injustices has presented a shift in both how I do my work and how I am seeing people across our Region and Episcopal Church coming together in new ways. As I continue once again to move around the Region, I keep finding a strong sense of the Holy Spirit and God's presence working their way in our shared life together.

The Gospel this morning encourages me to think about endurance and what it means to us now in these times of uncertainty, where there is just so much going on around us. Jesus talks about the strong roots we need to secure in order to be prepared to live and thrive in the difficult journey of being his follower. It is difficult to receive the Word and always know what to do, but finding ways to nurture it, is such an important necessity.

There are several ways in our Region to see how the Word and the Spirit are taking hold and rooting down. It has been wonderful to see the growth, the new ideas, and the collaboration all coming together. I think it is an important connection between what Jesus is calling us to do this morning and what is taking hold locally, around us in this moment.

First off, I am so thrilled that St. John's has partnered with St. Paul's Brookfield with quiche making. This important program came together recently. It's been named Make a Meal, Make a Difference. It serves local residents who have been identified by local social workers, and members of both St. John's and St. Paul's provide frozen dinners to people who are homebound and could use these important meals. Local volunteers have, and are needed to deliver to the residents for drop off. It has taken off strongly with an overwhelming response of meals! Working on addressing the systemic problem of food insecurity has been one area where there has been so much collaborative work of our parishes and local communities, which branches out to social workers and other agencies. There are a few other projects lifting off the ground to

ensure food security for folks and this is a testimony to the strength of those in our Region.

Going outside our walls is so important! During this time, I have recognized that as much as I love our church buildings and knowing that they can be the place to secure us down, we are also so aptly able to shift ourselves as a church community no matter the location. The flexibility of staying together albeit in new settings is important for us as we move forward.

There are other areas where I see the Northwest Region taking hold to be the body of Christ. It is in its coming together online of Morning Prayer and Compline through Zoom, collaborating with spirituality practices, and even a Region Bible Study led by local clergy. The Region Leadership Team which comes together monthly works to form relationships and ministries within our Region. Several classes of lay preachers have been nurtured over the last two years, who are inspiring and giving sermons throughout the year in their parishes. A hiking ministry had been in the works prior to Covid-19, and wonderings on how to pursue ministering to those hikers on the Appalachian Trail as well as how we can use our own beauty of creation as a means to come together still percolates. There are many other areas of new and creative ministry which I am grateful to have encountered people in our churches in this Region working upon. This includes work with refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants. It also includes healing prayer, the use of Camp Washington, lakeside Bible Studies, and more.

Anti-Racism work is one crucial area that is moving forward together. This past week was the White Picket Fences book discussion. This upcoming week a collaboration of Episcopal Churches in our Northwest Corner of the Northwest Region are hosting a Zoom weekly film discussion on race and how we can actively become anti-racist and this work is open to all. Another monthly opportunity is a collaborative effort focusing on action and film discussion between the Episcopal Church and Congregational Church in the Torrington and Goshen area. This necessary ministry is open to all across our Region on Zoom and is essential grounding for us to do the work we are called to commit to. The graces during this troubling time also allow for a coming together in new ways which can permit us to practice our faith and do the work that Jesus demands of us. It is a grounding exercise. Our roots are planted, and this is the work that Jesus talks of in his parable this morning.

Throughout all of these ministries and engagements, I also see the importance of taking time to rest, reflect, and rejuvenate. The passage this morning opens with Jesus sitting by the sea. He leaves the house and goes to sit quietly, alone before the crowds gather. Jesus leaves for the boat as more and more come to see and hear him. Jesus still engages the growing crowds, yet he still keeps his space. I see that as a necessary reminder for us today. It is important to be intentional about how we take care of ourselves. Prior to this pandemic, I think many of us were stretched thin, and now we have the added stresses of our lives. We cannot be rooted without taking care of

ourselves first. With that base planted, we can do so much more and be ready for the journey ahead.

So as we leave St. John's this morning and step outside these doors into Washington, our surrounding towns, and the greater community, we are choosing to ground ourselves, and in doing so, our actions will be stronger and prevalent. The actions of kindness and justice amidst God's everlasting and deep love for each of us, shines through in the work of this Church and the rest of our churches in the Region. Despite the challenging times we live in, the Spirit is resonating through us. Let us use the gifts of space and reflection to foster the resources that God gives us. So my prayer this morning is that we always remember to take that extra breath, that necessary space, to firmly and clearly see the Jesus' permanent love, and ground ourselves. We can then transform ourselves and the world around us to be prepared and willing, ready to create space for a countless amount of wonderful change and action. Amen.