

The St. John's Pulpit

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AT ONE
Romans 3:21-25

Fourth Sunday in Kingdomtide, September 24, 2017
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“Quite independently of law, God’s justice has been brought to light. The Law and the prophets both bear witness to this light which is God’s way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith – all, without distinction. For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and all are redeemed by God’s free grace alone, through God’s act of atonement in the person of Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:21-25, The New English Bible)

Yesterday being a beautiful Saturday, they went out for breakfast and spent some time at Freedom Park for the Festival before stopping by the Farmer’s Market at the corner of Kings and Morehead. Upon returning home, they took the dog for a walk and talked about their calendar for the next couple of weeks. They just celebrated their fifth anniversary Early in the afternoon, she spoke to him from across the room, as he browsed through the mail. She asked, *“Can I ask you a question?”* *“Sure,”* he replied, without lifting his face. *“Do you know how much I love you?”* she asked. This was really her preamble question. He responded, *“Yeah, I know you love me. Do you know how much I love you?”* *“Yes,”* she said, and was quiet. He lifted his eyes to glance her way, *“What’s going on?”* She then asked her real question, *“Do you ever feel like something’s missing in your life or in our life together?”* He lifted his head, thought for a moment before offering, *“Honey, we are so busy and our lives are too full to add anything else.”* She took the conversation deeper by saying, *“That’s just it; I am confused how my life can be so full and still not fulfilled. There’s a gap, a space and I need to quit trying to fill it with temporary stuff. I want to explore a spiritual life that connects me with the eternal and I am not sure where to begin.”* He was silent. Something told him their lives were about to change.

Next weekend, our Jewish friends will observe Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. ‘Atone’ literally means being ‘at one’ with God in relationship and purpose. Since ancient times, the idea that sin causes a gap, a space in the relationship between a person and God has been taught. The Day of Atonement focuses on humility and sacrifice. It focuses you on spiritual renewal in your relationship with God by aligning your life with God in a way that costs you something. Jesus became angry in the Temple Court as people were buying and selling animals to sacrifice rather than offering animals they had fed and tended themselves. Jesus became angry because they turned sincere faith practices into business propositions. Jesus knew that being ‘At One’ with God is the only way to have a fulfilling life.

How does Yom Kippur and a fulfilling life connect with MT25? I am so glad you asked.

Jesus came to live among us because of the gap – the space – that exists in the relationship between God and humanity. This gap is caused by human sin – and when sin is not tended, problems multiply exponentially. Wherever, whenever, however sin awakes – our world breaks. Jesus sacrificed his life to make us ‘at one’ with God in relationship and purpose. When we are at one with God in relationship, we are at one with God in purpose.

My favorite paradigm for Atonement is ‘Cruciform;’ which means ‘cross shaped.’ Jesus did not have to die on the cross to appease an angry God. Jesus chose to die on the cross because of the human need to be at one with God in relationship and purpose. Jesus chose the cross and he calls you to “*take up your cross*” BEFORE you follow him. Christian discipleship is cross-shaped; Cruciform. AFTER you pick up your cross, you can follow Jesus. In making you at one with God, Jesus redeems you so you can join God in the work of redemption. Our MT25 initiatives are Cruciform – cross shaped – and will promote a healthier relationship between you and God increasing your fulfillment in daily living. Jesus shows us the way of the cross, cruciform discipleship, is to meet others at their point of need.

You are at one with God, so you work as one with God. MT25 orients our servant ministries to reflect Jesus’ words: “*as often as you serve the least of these, you do it to me.*” The influence of our impact in metro-Charlotte and beyond will continue to strengthen and expand. Through your involvement in MT25, you will be ‘at one’ with God in redeeming the lives of others.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you serve CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you become involved in EDUCATION.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you care for others through HEALTHCARE.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you minister to those who are HOMELESS.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you feed those who are living with HUNGER.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God as you invest in PEACEBUILDING.

Some of you will be ‘at one’ with God extending the compassion of our ST. JOHN’S COMMUNITY.

This past week, we watched workers in Mexico City rescuing victims after the earthquake. Occasionally, they raised their fists as they heard a voice or a sound coming from inside the carnage. In concerted and collaborative efforts, they focused on those in need; those who were estranged and lost. They did not raise their fists as a symbol of aggression. They raised their fists as a symbol of hope proclaiming, “Listen.” Beloved, listen for people near and far who are wanting to be at-one with God and with us. Live at one with God in cruciform discipleship so even your friends who are living full lives can see your fulfilled living in the shape of a cross. Amen & AMEN.