

W Thomas – 14th Sunday after Pentecost Sermon
St. Thomas Episcopal Church Oriental NC – 08-30-26
Transcription

O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. For God invites us to live in love like Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and others to do the same. This sermon explores how the promises made in Holy Baptism intersect with the actions the Apostle Paul calls forth from the people of the way in Romans 12.9-21. Yes, you heard that passage.

Buckle up, you're going to hear it again. What I'm going to attempt to do here is odd for a sermon. I'm going to bring a moment of quiet towards the end, when you'll have a moment to reflect before I close with a prayer on how two pieces of what you've heard connect.

The first piece that I'm going to bring before you reminds you about what it means to be baptized. I'm going to read the affirmations and renunciations from baptism, and the baptismal covenant. And then I'm going to reread again those incredible words from Paul, and I want you to be able to meditate on how they connect the dots to your sense of what it means to be baptized.

We have a tendency sometimes to forget about all that we are in followers of Jesus, people of the way, come from our entrance into this life through baptism. And it's really easy for the people who get to dress as lovely as I do, who stand before you in church, to forget that. When I was in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, that vestry wisely said, you know there's this process you kept talking about in a call, called Living Our Baptismal Covenant, a catechumenate.

We want to do this. Every week we'll gather for eight months and study the word, and there's a whole lot more to it. I was like, I was blown away.

Leland, clergy supported, mutual ministry, what an ideal. And after two years of doing this and helping it, I came into my office one evening, and I looked at the wall. I got ordained, by the way, in the Diocese of Long Island, home of incredible ordination certificates.

I mean, the way the writing is done is holding, which is beautiful, calligraphy like you wouldn't believe. I have them framed, diaconate, priest, just like dressing up right now. And I looked at it, and I said, there was something missing.

And I went home, and I found my baptismal certificate. I had it framed, and I placed it underneath the wall so that the baptismal certificate reminded me that all that I am is a follower of Jesus, comes out of my baptism, and the fact that I am given the privilege of standing before you now is that you, meaning the general body of Christ, recognizes some gifts that might be of use to all of us, and that so within that, I am calling this sermon as something to remind me as well. And after that brief moment of awkward, priestly silence, would I then offer Bishop Brent's call it for mission, a prayer that I discovered some 25 or 30 years ago, that evokes the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, you will see how it all comes together, and how in many ways I find it so alive at St. Thomas in Orient.

So having said that, let us remind you of what it means to be baptized, and the words that might have been said over you, or for you, or by you. I'm not asking for any responses, just let me read this.

Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? I renounce them.

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world, which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? I renounce them.

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? I renounce them.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior? I do.

Do you put your whole trust in His grace and love? I do.

Do you promise to follow and obey Him as your Lord? I do.

Will you continue in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers? I will, with God's help.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? I will, with God's help.

Will you proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ? I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? I will, with God's help.

Having God floating in and around and through the affirmations and the promises made at Baptism and the Covenant, hear these words of wisdom from Paul, which are very much like guiding values for all of us. Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Do not claim to be wiser than you are, do not repay anyone's evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If it is possible, so far it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. No, if your enemies are hungry, feed them.

If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will eat burning coals on their heads.

Brief Period of Meditative Silence

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hardwood cross, that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace. So clothe us in your Spirit, that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you, for the honor of your name.

All these words I offer in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.