



Let us pray:

Holy One, you love with a father's tenderness and a mother's zeal. Move now in our hearts. Breathe through the words we hear, the songs we share and the burdens we carry until we discover our purpose in your liberating love. We long to join creation's praise and to shine with the mercy of the Christ in whose name we pray. **Amen.**¹

Our house in Greenwood is bordered on two sides by a farm that has been in the family for about 100 years. The crops alternate between corn and soybeans. This year it is soybeans. Scott and I keep watch over the seasons as the ground is prepared, planted and harvested. This is a soybean year. And we noticed something interesting this year. The farmer didn't seem to put down weed killer before planting. Guess what: we can clearly see weeds growing up among the soybeans! And we're wondering what will happen come harvest time in addition to wondering why not weed killer this year.

Maybe you've had the experience of weeding your garden and whoops! You inadvertently pulled up an onion rather than a weed- or a flower when you were trying to give the flowers more room to grow. One of the challenges of weeding out the tares when you were only trying to do good.

One of the strengths of the Episcopal Church is its desire to be a *via media*. That is, to be a church that is a middle way between Catholicism –with a capital “C” - and Protestantism. To find the best of the traditional, orthodox church that grew up following the death of Jesus and the reforms that we usually think of as starting with Martin Luther and expressed first in his 95 Theses nailed to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517.

From almost the very beginning, some have criticized the Episcopal Church as being “wishy-washy.” That anything goes. That we can believe anything and it's ok. We've even been criticized for not reading the Bible.

Well, as you all know, each Sunday worship service with the Eucharist has 4 lessons from the Bible: an Old Testament reading, a Psalm, a New Testament reading and the Gospel. So, that particular criticism has to be from people who have never been to one of our worship services.

It is true that we are not a “doctrinal” or a “creedal” church in the sense that some others are. We do not require that you sign a document stating that you believe a particular set of dogmas in order to be a member of the Episcopal Church. There is no Westminster or similar catechism that one signs stating “this I believe” in order to be a member of the Episcopal Church – unlike many Presbyterian and some Baptist and other reformed traditions.

¹ Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. Feasting on the Word Worship Companion Year A. vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014) 80.

For Episcopalians, baptism is the point at and through which we become members of the one, holy, catholic (small “c”) and apostolic church. And even there, some criticize us because we permit infant baptisms. There is just no pleasing everyone!

The gospel today highlights that we live with good and evil side-by-side. So intertwined that rejecting the evil can destroy the good. Cautioning us to leave to God what is God’s job. God will sort through humankind and determine what is good and what is not.

Jesus is quite clear that the separation of good and evil will be done at the end of the age, not today. It is not our job to determine who is good and who is evil and then to root out those we determine are evil. Our job is to be the good seed- the children of the kingdom- who live in the here and now in ways that express God’s love for each of us.

But somehow many have come to believe it is our job as Christians to determine who is good and who is evil. To determine what is acceptable to believe and what is not. And to root out- by shunning or excommunication or otherwise- those who don’t believe as we do. That to be a member of a particular church, one must believe very specific dogmas and doctrines. Leave your questions at the door at many churches. The Gospel is black-and-white; no questioning permitted.

The Episcopal Church takes a different approach. The *via media* says there is value to both sides of any discussion. It is our right – and our obligation- to ask questions. It is our responsibility to discern God’s truth as we understand it and then to live by that truth.

We don’t all have to agree on everything. People of good conscience- people who are faithful Christians- can and do disagree about doctrine and dogma. In the Episcopal Church, we tend to value *orthopraxy* over *orthodoxy*. That is, “right practice” over “right belief.” It is more important that we sit in the pew together, pray together, worship together, than it is that we agree on every jot and tittle of a particular issue.

Yes, many of us hold very strong, devout, well-reasoned positions on particular issues. Asking the questions, engaging in discussion with others, and then coming to our decision on a particular issue is part of what we are called to do as Christians. But just because someone else comes to another decision on a particular issue doesn’t necessarily make us right and them wrong. We still are called to sit together, to pray together and to worship together. The Eucharist is God’s gift to all of us- not just to those who agree with us.

Bishop Cate Waynick is fond of saying that Jesus calls us to love one another – not to always like each other, and not to always agree with one another. Rather, to love another. As humans, we have a strong bias for black-and-white, rules and regulations – ways that we can judge who is in and who is out. A way to know for sure our place in our community. Jesus tells us that we may not always have this kind of comfort- that God will do the sorting out at the end of the age. Jesus calls us to live with uncertainty. Jesus calls us to live with beliefs and practices that the broader world may snicker at. Wondering how we can be so naïve, so foolish, so out-of-step with what the world values.

Some days it seems like those who walk a different path – with different beliefs than ours- are the ones who get the glory, the praise, the recognition. And that can hurt when we've put our heart and soul into doing what is right. Into living a life that exemplifies as best as we are able, the way of Jesus.

What's the point, some ask, of denying myself when doing so doesn't get recognized for being good and valued? The point is that Jesus showed us the way to live. Jesus showed us that even giving up your life to promote justice is the way that God asks of us.

Jesus gave us the two great commandments which were built upon the Shema, the foundational instruction of God to the people of Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Some of you may have visited the home of observant Jews. When you enter the front door, you may notice a small cylinder on the door post. It is called a *mezuzah* and inside are the words from Deuteronomy- the Shema. Whenever you enter or you leave, you touch the Mezuzah to remind yourself of these words and their importance to our relationship with God. Tradition brought forward into everyday actions that help to keep our relationship with God front and center.

The prophet Micah also gives us words which are a framework for our lives building, also, upon the Shema and foreshadowing the two great commandments from Jesus:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Nothing here about our deciding who is in and who is out. What is here is how we are to live if we are to call ourselves children of God.

Do justice – strive for peace and respect the dignity of every human being.

Love kindness – recognize and support those who are kind and gentle and compassionate to others. Be kind- give of your resources, your gifts and your talents to those who are in need. Walk humbly with your God. Pray, worship. Partake in the Eucharist- the bread and the wine that symbolize the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ and our connection each and every time to the community of the faithful and to the love that God has for us and commands us to have for each other.

God will sort out the evil and the good. We do not need to worry ourselves with that task. We **do need** to live in ways that show that we have listened to the words of Jesus. *Let anyone with ears listen. Amen.*