

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sermon for April 20, 2008
Raymond Raney

Acts 7:55-60
Psalm 31:1-5,15-16
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

Stephen was a good man. Stephen was the first deacon, chosen and ordained by the Apostles to serve the widows and the orphans, to make sure that everyone received what they needed from the gifts that the community had put together.

If you remember last week's reading from Acts, the community of believers had come together to live as family. They sold what they could and brought together what they owned so that all shared in the wealth of the community “according to their need.”

And as happens in group settings, some of those in need were not receiving what they needed, and complaints reached the ears of the Apostles. The difficulty for the Apostles was that their business was the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. That's the difficulty because the nuts and bolts of the community needed attention. So the Apostles decided to appoint deacons to care for the people, and take care of the family, make sure everyone was fed and clothed and cared for.

That's like what we have here at Holy Cross with the various ministries you all participate in. We have the ECW, the Episcopal Church Women, who step in to make sure the needs of hospitality are met. We have the Men's Fellowship, who meet once a month and come together to take on tasks on the ground and the building. We have the Altar Guild to take care of our worship. We have the Acolytes to serve at the altar. We have the Prayer Shawl Ministry to give us the gift of prayers for those who are ill. And we have all of you who minister to each other in ways too numerous to mention. And we have the Vestry.

This past Sunday the Vestry met in retreat to talk and share their spiritual journeys, and to assess the needs for ministries at Holy Cross. You can look at the bulletin board to refresh yourself of the names and ministries, but we have a new Vestry now, and the ministries they taken on are:

Senior Warden Dan Hovious will take care of the ministry of Administration and Finance.

Junior Warden Elaine Wheaton will oversee the ministry of Hospitality.

The ministry of Buildings and Grounds will be in the hands of Ed Weinbrecht.

The ministry of Christian Education will be cared for by Judy Tucker.

The ministry of Membership Development will be ministered by Jane Vickers.

Wendy Northorn will be the minister of Outreach and Mission.
The ministry of Communications will be in the hands of Barry Hogge.
The ministry of our Parish Life will be cared for by Jennifer Noyer.
Stewardship will be in the ministry of Hardy Brothers.

Like the deacons of the early church, our Vestry oversees the ministries of Holy Cross. They are not our only ministers. Each and every one of us are called to serve others in our church family.

I have distributed the pledges of time and talent many of you filled out as part of the Stewardship campaign, so expect to be called in the near future.

If you did not pledge your assistance in the past or have come to Holy Cross since the fall, please, consider yourselves asked to join in the ministries of this church. I have posted the descriptions of each of the ministries of the Vestry. Please read them and if you feel called to assist in these ministries, contact the vestry person who has been tasked with that ministry.

If there are ministries that you see a need for, but are not expressed in the ministries that we now recognize, talk with me about that need, and we will move forward in ministry together to meet that need. We must care for each other, to support each other each week to strengthen our resolve and our ability to serve the world beyond these walls.

Stephen was tasked with caring for those in need within his church family, but he was also called to take the word of God into the lives of those who did not know the Way and the Truth and the Life.

Preaching on street corners is not big in the Episcopal Church. I've heard my share of those shouts of "Repent!" I believe that we are called to live our lives as examples for those around us, that the nature of our lives call attention to the Good that Christ has given us in our lives. Then when we are asked what makes our lives different, we can share the words of Jesus with open hearts.

Believe me, it is not easy to do the right thing in this world. Too often the easy way would be to lie or to evade the truth. We are not invited to honesty in the world we live in. We are expected to act in our own self interest.

Sometimes, as often as not, doing the right thing carries a cost we'd rather not pay. Jesus did the right thing, and it cost him his life on the Cross. Stephen, following the example of Jesus, did the right thing and it cost him his life. When we are called to do the right thing, we cannot know the price we will pay, but we are called.

The consolation is that Jesus was raised from the dead, and Stephen saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. We can be encouraged by that promise, that this life is not the end, but only the beginning. But we are also tasked to work for the betterment of this world, in the here and now.

If the world was the place I would have it be, doing the right thing would always be rewarded. The one who does what is right, would be the one to prosper. The one who does good, would be honored.

But we all know, this is not the way the world works. More often than not, the one who does the right thing will not be honored. We humans have a history of honoring the good only after they are long dead. We build monuments to the honored of the past to remind us of how we should behave, what we should do.

Those monuments are important. We must learn from those who paid the price of doing the right thing. What we as Christians must work for is making this world reflect the world as we would have it be, rather than allowing it to continue to be the world that it was.

We are called to work for justice, freedom and peace in this world. And if we work hard enough maybe the number of monuments honoring those who did the right thing will not be many as have been in the past.

May we look forward to a day when those who do the right thing are honored in their own day.