

'O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples.' These words are from the appointed Collect for Proper 16.

The prayer we know as the Collect is just what it is titled: a collection of thoughts, petitions, and prayers. They synthesize the appointed scripture texts for the Sunday, which many times assist the preacher with their weekly message. Matthew 16:13-20 records that Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say is the Son of Man?" They respond that the prophets Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist are the Son of Man. Their response is close to the belief that the prophets' message is that of the Creator God.

Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" Peter responds that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus welcomes Peter's response with: "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven". Peter's response is much clearer than what the writers have written. Peter is declaring that Jesus is God on earth, sent as a liberator for the people of Israel. He accepts Jesus as God, giving the important first step in the Trinity.

I have been writing about storytelling and the importance of each person's story. My work at the Church of the Redeemer began with asking members to tell their story. I have had the privilege and honor to share two sacred stories that I recognize as prophetic witnesses. When people name the child of God as a prophet, they do so with the complete understanding that each prophet is God's messenger on earth.

Each sermon and message at the Church of the Redeemer this summer, in the Season of Sacred Story, has been a recollection of the Prophetic Witness to our faith. Each of them has been about people both well-known and unknown. Their stories are a witness to faith in action as modeled by Jesus.

We are told that Jesus instructed Peter to build the church. For me, Peter is the symbol and emblem of each of us building the church. Every believer, at one time in their journey, shares the Prophetic witness of their practice of faith in action. Members of the Church of the Redeemer know that the keys to the kingdom of God are not just found at churches named after the Apostle Peter.

This past week I had misplaced my keys to St Paul's, and for an entire six days I felt incomplete. There was not a moment in this period that I felt vulnerable. I continued my daily routine and my ministry. Faith in action is a practice that each of us committed to in our covenant of Baptism. The keys to the kingdom of God are found in the practices of loving one another and of radical hospitality, as Jesus instructed.

The sacred stories for this season have included Frederick Douglass; Heather Elkins; Jonathan Kozol; Reverend Richard Mason Abercrombie; Charles Schultz; Dolores Davidson Most; Wilma Mankiller; Elston Howard; Jeanne Sobelson Manford. Each of these stories embodies God's LOVE and Jesus' Radical Hospitality.

What I am inspired to do each time I hear or read a sacred story is simply ask: SEND ME IN, COACH. The familiar words in the chorus of the hymn of Here I Am, Lord, say:

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

Practice your faith, not all the extras. Your faith is best expressed in your individuality, another gift from God.