

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 8, Year C
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The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

Helen Mallicoat has written a poem that is worth pondering for each of us individually wherever it is that we find ourselves and for St. Andrew's as well as we travel this journey of interim time. Listen:

"I was regretting the past,
and fearing the future.
Suddenly my Lord was speaking:
"My name is I am." He paused.
I waited. He continued,
"When you live in the past,
with its mistakes and regrets,
it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I was.

When you live in the future
with its problems and fears,
it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I will be.

When you live in this moment,
it is not hard. I am here.
My name is I am." (Internet posting)

A good poem to ponder because it makes us each ask the question, am I an "I was" person? Or am I an "I will be" person? Or am I an "I am" person? Are we at St. Andrew's an I was church, an I will be church or an I am church. Our answer will tell us much about our relationship with Jesus.

At times in my life it has been so easy for me and I expect that might be the same for you, it has been so very easy to get caught up in being an "I was" person. It is so easy to keep our focus on what has happened in the past or to keep our focus on the way life has always been lived. Goodness

knows, we do that in the church. How many times does someone ask, “Why do you do such and such?” and the answer is, “We have always done it that way.”

An “I was” person might be someone who is stuck in his or her anger or pain. Now, I do not mean that we should not look at our anger and our pain and try to work through it. But, you know as well as I that sometimes we just plain get stuck in it and never move on; our anger or our pain rule how we live.

“To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Jesus tells us today that if we are to be his disciples, then we are not to get stuck being “I was” people.

Jesus calls us out of our looking back; Jesus calls us out of our places of being stuck in our looking back. Some looking back is necessary but the kind that prevents us from following Jesus, the kind that prevents us from living in the freedom of God’s love, the kind that prevents us from risking change only because our looking back tells us how it has always been done, the kind of looking back that cripples us, the looking back that makes it impossible to live in love, to all those kinds of looking back Jesus says we can not be his disciples if we are “I was” people.

Jesus also tells us not to get stuck with being “I will be” people. And again, some focus on the future is necessary, but the kind of focus that cripples our lives; the kind that makes it impossible to live fully, today, that kind of focus is unhealthy and is not at all what Christian discipleship is all about.

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’”

Jesus was saying that if we come along on this journey, it will be a journey that has no certainty of what will happen in the future. To be Christian disciples means to live fully today in God's kingdom, to take on God's challenge today, without any guarantee of how it will be in the future, to follow God's call without any guarantees. To be Christian disciples means to be totally dependent on God, trusting completely in God's promise to provide. That is true for our personal lives and it is true for St. Andrew's in this time of searching for a new rector. Jesus tells us not to get so caught up in what life will be, like when the new rector is on board, don't get so caught up that we forget to live now. I am certainly guilty of this as I am just as likely to say, to everything, let's wait for the new rector. While sometimes that might be a good idea, it really is true that most of the time the better idea is to do what might be the more difficult thing by making a decision now.

Jesus calls us as disciples to be "I am" people. People who live in the moment, informed by the past, aware of the future, but firmly rooted in today giving ourselves totally to God's love, God's care, God's will. "I am" people trust that God will provide the way. "I am" people live in God's freedom, a freedom that is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. This is a freedom that is characterized by forgiveness. This freedom is free from the burden of the past and worries about the future. God's freedom gives us the courage to be risk takers. God's freedom gives us freedom from all that is destructive, all that is self-serving. God's freedom moves us out of being stuck in the past or waiting for the future. God's freedom gives us life - today.

So, today, let us all join the journey as Jesus' disciples; today let us all be "I am" people.