

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 4, Year C
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The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

"Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine."

Do any of you know this beautiful old hymn?

That's all that I know of it, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine. And I have to tell you that I think that it is just plain wrong. Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine is not congruent with the Gospel and in my mind it is just plain wrong. I believe that instead of Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, the words should be, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Ours.

For Christianity is just not a me and my Jesus kind of religion. And don't let anyone tell you that it is. It is a religion that requires community. Stop and think about it. Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday. Now I wasn't here last Sunday but I understand that Berry preached a really good sermon. I wish that I could have heard it. I mention Trinity Sunday because the Trinity represents to us the mystery of God in community - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Or as Barbara Brown Taylor states in referring to the mystery of the Trinity and to community - "Mystery loves company." God in community.

As you well know, Jesus certainly could have come and done his work all by himself, he was God after all. But he didn't. And even better yet, Jesus could have come and chosen only one disciple; that would be a perfect me and my Jesus, a perfect Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine. Except that he didn't. He called a community of disciples and he sent this community of disciples out into their communities. Blessed Assurance, Jesus is ours.

Today's Gospel is a perfect example of this community. Did you realize that there was absolutely no personal encounter between the centurion and Jesus or between the slave and Jesus? Listen again: "A centurion had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking Jesus to come and heal his slave." The centurion did not rely on his own power or

his own authority. Instead, he sent a community to speak with Jesus, a community who could testify to his character, a community who could, if needed, a community who could persuade Jesus.

And then, when Jesus was on his way to the centurion's home, but before he got there, again the centurion sent his community to Jesus. It was this community who told Jesus of this man's great faith and right then and there without ever meeting the centurion or the slave, Jesus healed the slave. Oh, the power and the importance of community.

Now, I'm quite certain that I am preaching to the choir when I preach about community at St. Andrew's. For you all certainly get it. You know about community. When we exchange the peace, when we pray the Lord's Prayer while holding hands, when we gather at the altar for healing prayers, when the congregation prays together for those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries, when the prayer chain and the Community of Hope are contacted for pastoral needs, what a perfect example of community. This is most definitely not a me and my Jesus type of place.

Knowing this, however, it is still always a good idea to be reminded. In the Episcopal Church, when someone senses a call to ordination, that call is always explored in community. If you ever feel that Jesus is calling you to something new, and that does not need to be ordination, it might not even be anything to do with the church, but when you feel that you are being called to something new, to some kind of change, test it in community, talk with your respected friends about it. Don't go it alone. Or when you are frightened, or sad, feeling lost or feeling guilty, it will be in community that you will find healing and hope and comfort.

Jesus calls each of us individually to go and leave our solitary lives and become a part of community. And our community extends, of course, outside of these walls into our various homes and villages and then out of these villages throughout Arizona, California, Utah, New Mexico and then throughout the United States and following that throughout the world. We can no longer live separated from our brothers and sisters around the world, we are all community. Jesus calls us to make community with those who are like us and with those who are not like us.

On this Memorial Day weekend, as we stop to reflect on those who have given their lives in service of our country, those who have given their lives so that we might live in freedom, so that our communities will be safe, and as we reflect on Jesus' call to live in community with those who are like us, those who are near to us, as well as to live in community with those who are most unlike us, to live in community with our brothers and sisters throughout the world, let our prayer be: O God of many names, lover of all peoples; we pray for peace in our hearts and homes, in our nations and our world; the peace of your will, the peace of our need. (New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 161)

Let us remember to live lives that preach to the world, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is ours. Amen.