

Episcopal News Service

Presiding Bishop-elect Katharine Jefferts Schori preached the homily at the Closing Eucharist June 21 at General Convention in Columbus, Ohio. The text of Jefferts Schori's homily follows:

Homily preached the General Convention's Closing Eucharist

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

The Right Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori

Grow in All Things into Christ

Lections for the Reign of Christ

Colossians 1:11-20

Canticle 18

John 18:33-37

This last Sunday morning I woke very early, while it was still dark. I wanted to go for a run, but I had to wait until there was enough light to see. When the dawn finally began, I ventured out. It was warm, and still, and very quiet, and the clouds were just beginning to show tinges of pink. I ran by the back of the Hyatt just as two workers were coming out one of the service doors. They were startled, I'm afraid, but I nodded at them, and they responded. I went west over the freeway, and encountered a man I'd seen here in the Convention Center. Neither of us stopped, but we did say a quiet good morning. Then I found a lovely green park, and started around it. There was a man with a reflective vest, standing in the street by some orange cones, as though he were waiting for a run or a parade to begin. I said good morning, and he responded in kind. Around the corner I came to a bleary-eyed fellow with several bags who looked like he'd just risen from sleeping rough. I said good morning to him too, but I must admit I went past him in the street instead of on the sidewalk. Then I met a rabbit hopping across the sidewalk, and though we didn't use words, one of us eyed the other with more than a bit of wariness. Around another corner, a woman was delivering Sunday papers from her car. She was wary too, and didn't get out of her car with the next paper until I was a long way past her. Back over the freeway, and a block later, two guys seemingly on their early way to work. We nodded at each other.

As I returned to my hotel, I reflected on all those meetings. There was some degree of wariness in most of them. There were small glimpses of a reconciled world in our willingness to greet each other. But the unrealized possibility of a real relationship – whether in response of wariness, or caution, or fear – meant that we still had a very long way to go.

Can we dream of a world where all creatures, human and not, can meet each other in a stance that is not tinged with fear?

When Jesus says that his kingdom is not of this world, he is saying that his rule is not based on the ability to generate fear in his subjects. A willingness to go to the cross implies a vulnerability so radical, so fundamental, that fear has no impact or import. The love he invites us to imitate removes any possibility of reactive or violent response. King Jesus' followers don't fight back when the world threatens. Jesus calls us friends, not agents of fear.

If you and I are going to grow in all things into Christ, if we're going to grow up into the full stature of Christ, if we are going to become the blessed ones God called us to be while we were

still in our mothers' wombs, our growing will need to be rooted in a soil of internal peace. We'll have to claim the confidence of souls planted in the overwhelming love of God, a love so abundant, so profligate, given with such unwillingness to count the cost, that we, too, are caught up into a similar abandonment.

That full measure of love, pressed down and overflowing, drives out our idolatrous self-interest. Because that is what fear really is – it is a reaction, an often unconscious response to something we think is so essential that it takes the place of God. “Oh, that’s mine and you can’t take it, because I can’t live without it” – whether it’s my bank account or theological framework or my sense of being in control. If you threaten my self-definition, I respond with fear. Unless, like Jesus, we can set aside those lesser goods, unless we can make “peace through the blood of the cross.”

That bloody cross brings new life into this world. Colossians calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead. That sweaty, bloody, tear-stained labor of the cross bears new life. Our mother Jesus gives birth to a new creation – and you and I are His children. If we’re going to keep on growing into Christ-images for the world around us, we’re going to have to give up fear.

What do the godly messengers say when they turn up in the Bible? “Fear not.” “Don’t be afraid.” “God is with you.” “You are God’s beloved, and God is well-pleased with you.”

When we know ourselves beloved of God, we can begin to respond in less fearful ways. When we know ourselves beloved, we can begin to recognize the beloved in a homeless man, or rhetorical opponent, or a child with AIDS. When we know ourselves beloved, we can even begin to see and reach beyond the defense of others.

Our invitation, both in the last work of this Convention, and as we go out into the world, is to lay down our fear and love the world. Lay down our sword and shield, and seek out the image of God’s beloved in the people we find it hardest to love. Lay down our narrow self-interest, and heal the hurting and fill the hungry and set the prisoners free. Lay down our need for power and control, and bow to the image of God’s beloved in the weakest, the poorest, and the most excluded.

We children can continue to squabble over the inheritance. Or we can claim our name and heritage as God’s beloveds and share that name, beloved, with the whole world.

http://www.ecusa.anglican.org/75383_76300_ENG_HTM.htm