

Sermon for Grace and Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, VA
Proper 21, Year C, September 29, 2019
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Full Sunday Experience"
Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; 1 Timothy 6:6-19

God, fill our homes with goodness; God, fill our minds with peace; God, fill our lives with loving neighbors; God, walk this road with us.
[paraphrase from hymn "When the Poor Ones"]

in our Baptismal Covenant we promise to be faithful in "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers;" recognize that there is a component of each of these elements in our worship; the breaking of bread and the prayers are clearly the main emphases of our worship; the apostles' teaching happens somewhat during the sermon, and fellowship happens somewhat during the passing of the peace; but teaching and fellowship do not receive enough time, within worship itself, for them to be able to work sufficiently upon us each Sunday

many people equate Sunday solely with the worship service; I'd like to suggest that we think of Sunday morning as a total of three activities, rather than as just one: worship, fellowship, and education; all three of these activities take place every Sunday here; if you don't already attend all three, I invite you to consider prayerfully how you might adjust your Sunday schedule accordingly; think of your Sunday experience here as incomplete if it is lacking any one of the three; only by attending all three activities of worship, fellowship, and education can you have the full experience that Sunday church has to offer; worship, without education, lacks understanding; worship, without fellowship, lacks relationships

let me unpack this a bit; if you only attend worship services, it is very difficult for you to get to know each other better; and I'm not talking about just getting to know each other better socially, though that's not a bad thing; I'm talking about getting to know each other better spiritually; it is in both the fellowship and education activities that we can interact with each other spiritually and deeply; before and after worship, you may have time for small talk, but in fellowship and in education, you have time for large talk

our Jeremiah reading refers to putting signed deeds “in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time;” what we hear in worship, no matter how important it may be, may not stick with us; what we discuss, and ask questions about, and take home handouts with us to mull over, has a greater chance of staying with us a long time

our 1st Timothy reading tells us to store up for ourselves “the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of the life that really is life;” education gives us the opportunity to see more clearly how our faith applies to our daily lives; how to put it into practice; how to live out our beliefs; how better to live “the life that really is life”

and what about visitors who come to worship with us? a quick conversation at the door doesn’t give us the opportunity to discover this child of God who has graced us, by visiting; a quick conversation at the door doesn’t give us the opportunity to share what we’re really about here at Grace and Holy Trinity; a quick conversation at the door doesn’t give us the opportunity to share what Christ is really up to among us and through our ministries here; Paul tells us elsewhere, in 2nd Corinthians (5:20), that “we are ambassadors for Christ;” that is a high calling; it is through our genuine desire to be successful ambassadors for Christ, to see our visitors experience the fullness of Christ at work in this church community, that we invite them to join us and to participate with us in fellowship and in education, as well as in worship; introduce yourself to anyone you don’t already know; and remember to wear your name tag, for the sake of our visitors

and it is not as if education and fellowship are two discrete and different activities; education doesn’t only happen at scheduled groups, classes, and events; there’s no opportunity to ask questions and respond to what is said in sermons during our worship time, but that can and should happen informally in the other parts of our Sunday activities; fellowship time at coffee hours or at breakfast allows us to discuss the Bible readings, the preaching, the prayers, the praises, and the music that we have experienced together in worship; there, we can ask questions and reflect together, informally enhancing our education; and fellowship doesn’t only happen at coffee hours and breakfast; there is always fellowship going on in our gatherings for education

in the same way that more people attending worship enhances the vitality of our worship experience (reaching a critical mass you might say), more people

attending fellowship enhances the vitality of our fellowship experience, and more people attending education activities enhances the vitality of our education experience; worship, fellowship, and education—these are avenues for God’s Grace, these are the Holy Trinity for a vital Sunday church experience, and overall, for a vital church; and I can promise you, without a doubt, that your New York Times crossword puzzle will not fill itself in back at your home if you spend a little more time at church every Sunday

“But Bill,” you may be thinking, “we’re Episcopalians, we’re not used to attending Sunday School as adults or staying for fellowship;” I’ll respond: how has that worked out for this parish? is this worshipping congregation as big as it possibly could be—as big as it should be? is your time together as a parish as exciting and as fulfilling as it possibly could be—as it should be? this participation in all three aspects of Sunday church is the next step in working towards that kind of excitement and that kind of fulfillment

imagine what a full experience each Sunday would be, with each and every one of us participating: in the the apostles’ teaching at education, in fellowship at coffee hours or breakfast, in the the breaking of bread and in the prayers at worship; imagine what that would do for the quality of our spiritual lives together; imagine how that would enhance our conversations, our interactions, and our relationships; imagine how that would fill our minds, our hearts, our souls; imagine how that would enhance the impact we can have, together, on our community and on our world