

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost  
November 10, 2019  
The Rev. Jamie Samilio  
Church of the Holy Cross

Haggai 1:15b-2:9  
Psalm 145:1-5, 18-22  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17  
Luke 20:27-38

### **Sometimes Christians**

I am so grateful to have all of you here, gathered together to thank God for all of our gifts, especially the gift of each other. Today, following our tradition, through the waters of Baptism and by the power of the Holy Spirit, two more souls will join us as our sisters in Christ. Last week we celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a parish family—the church was packed. There were about 150 people in this space on Sunday morning—the energy was incredible! Because of the generosity of our founders and pioneers, and of all of you, we have the good fortune every week to see our gifts to Holy Cross turn into beautiful music, inspirational sermons, meaningful outreach, Christian Formation programs for all ages, and more. On this day of Ingathering, I want to thank everyone for supporting the mission and ministry of Holy Cross. It takes a village to administer, maintain, clean, beautify, practice, plan, write, invite, welcome, and connect us—every effort, and every dollar counts!

In the scripture today, Paul’s words to the Thessalonians sounded like a message directed at us. Let us give thanks to God for our, brothers and sisters, beloved by the Lord. God chose us as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit, and through our belief in the truth. God has called us to proclaim the good news, and stand firm and hold fast to our traditions. May God through Jesus comfort our hearts and strengthen them in *every good work and word*.

We are God’s gift to each other. We are the first fruits. What we say and do, matters. It matters if we show kindness, do justice, and walk humbly. It matters if we love each other as Jesus loved us—everyday, and in every moment. When we were baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit it was not so we would sometimes be Christians—it was forever.

Still, the last time I self-checked, I was slightly short of living into my Christian identity 24/7, in every word and action that comes from me and out into the world. I am not perfect, far from it, and I too fall into sin and temptation—we all do. It is what happens after we fall, that makes all the difference in the world. We ask for forgiveness, and we try again...and again...and again.

We have a tradition of Baptism, and a covenant that we say each time we Baptize a new member into the Body of Christ. I want to take a more serious look at that covenant, and get us thinking about how we keep that covenant in our daily lives.

So, I ask, Do you believe in God the Father creator of heaven and earth? We reply that we believe, but does your understanding of science water down this belief? Have you reconciled science with the idea that all of creation is connected and began from a single source? Or do you believe because you have faith? In Hebrews 11, Paul says of faith, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is trusting in something you

cannot prove. If you have a relationship with God, I find that the foundation of that relationship is always, trust.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Jesus was, is, and is to come. Jesus understands our human condition, and we can trust Him with the problems of our world. Jesus is our comfort, and our example to follow.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit? This is the part of the covenant that I wish was expanded a bit. The Holy Spirit is with us now, right now, here in this place and everywhere. I best understand the Holy Spirit when I experience imagination, inspiration, and when I hear that small still intuitive voice in my head.

What follows the Holy Spirit question is a list of other things to believe like the holy catholic Church, and by catholic we mean universal. The communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins. Believing in forgiving sins is one thing, but forgiving people when they sin against us, that is the practice. Forgiveness is the one thing we all seem to want, yet are often stingy in extending it to others. The irony, is that forgiveness can help to heal our relationships, and we need healing. If you want to focus on one spiritual practice that can change your life, I recommend forgiveness.

The next set of questions are all answered, “I will with God’s help.” Without God’s help we tend to be self-serving—we are wired that way. I am not sure we can do much well without God’s help, Jesus’ example, or guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? This is a personal question. Will you continue to love God and each other and to show that love through your words and actions? Will you continue to come to Church to give thanks, worship and break bread?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? I am going to try to resist, will you? But, what if you enjoy doing those things that tempt you? And we do. What if you like overindulgence, and self-serving practices—why repent? Can I be a Christian hedonist? For me, being mean and self-centered, usually lands me somewhere alone, disconnected, and untrusted by people—and it is my own fault. I need repentance. Repentance to be made whole, and reconnect with the world. Work on asking for and giving forgiveness.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Paul says, “...in every good work and word.” Sometimes I think we have a difficult time proclaiming that we have acted kindly because we are Christians. When people say things to us like, “Aren’t you nice?” I think we rarely respond, “That’s what Jesus would do.” We should change this. We are often shy about proclaiming our faith, because it makes us vulnerable. But, we can do it—with God’s help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? This question is really asking us to see Christ in each other, to recognize each other as children of God, brothers and sisters. To love each other as family—this is the core of our Baptismal vows.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? After 9/11 we heard the phrase, “If you see something, say something.” This is not just for security. It applies to marching in protests, and giving to causes. Opportunities to work for justice happen every day, right in front of us. When we see someone bullied, we need to call out the bully. When we see someone belittled, or treated badly because of their job, education, race, religion, or any reason, we need to call it out. Strive everyday, to stand up, for each other and with each other. Respecting the

dignity of every human being means everyone, no exceptions. Respect everyone, as they are, whoever they are and wherever they are on their journey of faith. And we can—with God’s help.

R E S P E C T, find out what it means. Practice it in all your affairs. Love one another, and learn how to live into this covenant and how to support each other—especially those newly baptized. We are all in this together, and each of our gifts that we share is important—every person, every gift, counts.

We are God’s gift to each other. What we say and do, matters. Share your gifts, practice forgiveness, claim your Christian identity, love and respect each other.

We are not sometimes Christians, we are in this forever. Amen.