



Proper 8, The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
June 28, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our readings from the Gospels this week and last have been all about the cost of following Jesus. Sometimes the cost is just giving up the distractions that seem more important than Jesus

And sometimes the cost is much higher. Why is it costly to follow Jesus? Because all too often we find that God's vision of the world clashes with what humanity wants. Jesus reveals to us a God of self-giving love, of passionate care and concern for others above self, and of sacrifice in order to bring peace. Something in our human nature pushes back against this heart of God. So, it takes a surrender on our part to follow the God revealed in Jesus Christ and, when we do follow him, we sometimes find that those who are not following him push back against us in their effort to push back against God.

Last week we saw a video clip of our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, speaking about the vocation of the Episcopal Church and how our vocation as Episcopalians sometimes puts at odds with the world around us – and even, sometimes, with other Christians. If we look back at the history of the Episcopal Church we can see how this vocation to follow Jesus in our unique and Episcopal way has been at times costly.

When the Episcopal Church sided with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, we found ourselves at odds with our own history and at odds with some of our own members. When we began to ordain women to the priesthood in the 1970s we found ourselves at odds with some of our fellow Christians. When we began to fully affirm the inclusion of LGBTQ people in the 1990s and early 2000s we found ourselves paying a cost once again in order to follow where we believed Jesus was calling us to go.

I would suggest that at each of these watershed moments, what we really found ourselves at odds with was a version of Christianity more comfortable with reading another chapter of the Bible than in really listening to Jesus and following him. But Jesus was calling us to a vocation of love that looked for God's heart as revealed in the Christ of scriptures and we had to follow him where he was calling us. There was a price to be

paid, in struggling through conflict and in lost membership and lost financial resources, but there was also an amazing reward to be experienced.

As Jesus says in today's Gospel, "whoever welcomes a prophet will receive a prophet's reward." And the reward of the prophets, who follow Jesus at all costs, is to see more deeply into the heart of God, to more fully experience the Kingdom of Heaven here and now, and know the joy of joining with Jesus in welcoming all people into God's life.

May Jesus give us the grace, as the Episcopal Church, to fulfill the vocation he has given us and to follow him wherever he may lead us.

Amen.