



“Bishop Saul’s Sermon to Calvary”

Proper 28-B
Calvary Church, Ashland
November 15, 2009

The Most Unlikely of Persons

Nine and one-half years ago I visited the Diocese of Lexington for the first time. It was during the walkabouts and interviews for the election of a new bishop. Calvary was one of the places I visited. St. Andrew’s in Lexington is another.

At the time, St. Andrew’s was a very different place than it is now. Now attendance is up, there is an engagement in mission, a support group for women veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, an outreach to the students of Transylvania University, and most importantly to why I am telling you this story, it is full of children of all ages. None of that was true nine years ago.

Nine years ago when I visited I was met by a group of older people, mostly older women. There was, shall we say, not a positive outlook. The group talked about how they were getting old, that there would be no more children, and that growth was out of the question. I expected them to say, “Will the last person to die, please turn out the lights.” One of them in particular, Mrs. Smallwood, who is now 97 years old, was particularly pessimistic about there being any more children. I looked at her and said, “Now, Mrs. Smallwood, don’t you know the story of Abraham and Sarah?” She paused for a minute and then chuckled. “Yes,” she said, “but you’re not Abraham.” I don’t know who was Abraham—or Sarah—but I do know that St. Andrew’s is now full of children. And all I can say is, “Isn’t that just like God?”

It is indeed just like God. It isn’t only St. Andrew’s. And it isn’t only Sarah. It is also Hannah, as today’s Old Testament lesson attests. Hannah, as the opening verses of First Samuel tell us, was without children. And this is exactly who God chooses to begin the story of the Prophet Samuel in the life of Israel. It was Samuel who anointed Saul to be king. It was Samuel who called Saul to account for his disobedience. It was Samuel who was God’s instrument in choosing David to be king over Israel. It was Samuel who called David, too, to account for his injustice in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite.

Here’s my point. What is just like God is to use the most unlikely of persons, even I dare say, the most unworthy of persons, for God’s own purposes. God chose a barren woman named Hannah to begin the tradition of prophecy in ancient Israel. God chose a barren woman named Sarah in her old age to begin the story of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, which God promised would outnumber the stars. God chose the grandson of Abraham who was not the oldest and thus lacked the family birthright, Jacob instead of Esau, and who was rather a scoundrel of the first order, to carry forth the promise to Abraham and Sarah. God chose the son of Jacob who had been sold into slavery in Egypt, Joseph, to save the people in a time of famine. God chose a shepherd named David who was, to say the least, of the most questionable moral character to deliver a promise that his family would rule over Israel forever and to be the ancestor of the Messiah. God chose a foreigner in Israel, a gentile named Ruth, to be part of line of the Messiah’s female ancestors, one of only three named in Gospel of Luke, along with a prostitute named Rahab and a self-serving and manipulative trickster named Tamar. God chose a boy named Jeremiah to speak truth to the kings of Judah. Talk about unlikely persons.

The mission of **Calvary Episcopal Church** is to seek and serve Christ through **Worship** which invigorates and challenges, **Education** which equips every member for a ministry, **Fellowship** opportunities which nurture all ages, and **Giving** of ourselves for the sake of those who do not belong.