

## **Comments on Youth Sunday**

Holy Eucharist, Rite I, 8:00 am

John 14:15-21

April 27, 2008

### **I.**

Today is Youth Sunday at the 10:00 am service. That means I will not preach a sermon at that service, but rather the youth will take over with their own presentation. And because there will be no regular sermon then, I won't impose one on you now. Instead, I would like to say a few things about our youth, and the importance of their participation in our worship.

And the youth service will be a little different from the Youth Sundays we have had in the past. As you know, early last year we joined with Christ Church in Bay St. Louis, St. Peter's by-the-Sea in Gulfport, and St. Patrick's in Long Beach to form a combined junior high and senior high school youth group that meets here on Sunday evenings.

These young people from all the churches have designed a complete Youth Sunday service, and they are going around to the four churches to present it. They were at St. Peter's and Christ Church earlier this month. People at St. Patrick's will celebrate it next Sunday.

So, our service at 10:00 am today is the result of our young peoples' work from start to finish. And they were very creative. They drew upon the prayer book used in the Anglican Province of New Zealand, as well as parts of Irish worship. Nothing is directly from our own Book of Common Prayer, and they will introduce us to a very contemporary and interactive form of worship.

### **II.**

But even though I'm not going to preach, old habits die hard and so I will start with today's Gospel reading as the background (Jn. 14:15-21). The setting was the night before Jesus' died, and he was talking to his disciples about some lasting things. All of his work on earth was finished, except for the cross. In a way this was Jesus' Last Will and Testament to his disciples, and he wanted them to know what they would inherit. He knew that within a matter of hours he would be arrested and his ordeal would begin.

And he also knew that his disciples were going to experience a time of crisis. According to John's Gospel the disciples had been traveling around with Jesus for about three years. It must have been an exciting and heady time. Think of all the crowds, the miracles, the preaching and teaching, and the special position in which they found themselves as they moved from place to place. All the enthusiasm, spirituality, and hope that they experienced was going to end. Jesus was going to die the next day, and it suddenly would be over.

So, when Jesus told them the Advocate was coming, and explained what it would mean, he was preparing them for the next stage of their ministry. That was the ministry of building the church after he was gone. It was the ministry of carrying on into the next generation.

### **III.**

And in a way, that's our relationship with our young people. We will not always be here. We will look to our young people to carry on after us. And we want those who follow us to be as dedicated and committed to the faith as the disciples were so long ago.

That's why we have tried to make our Sunday School and youth ministry a priority here at St. Thomas. It's why we have parents' meetings each month, and why we emphasize more and more youth activities. It's why our youth budget is a lot bigger now, the single largest increase in any part of our budget over the last two years.

I invite any of you who are free to do so to stop by our 10:00 am service. If you consider this 8:00 service as your normal Sunday worship, then you might consider the 10:00 service as a preview of things to come.

And a few years from now our worship at St. Thomas might start looking more like the 10:00 service today than our regular 10:00 service. For those who are at the 10:00 service they will see that the basics stay the same. The bread and the wine still will be consecrated. And as always we will recognize Christ's presence at the Holy Table.

But the words, and the feelings they impart, and the hope that is inherent in young people clearly comes through. And, of course, the music will be very noticeably different. It doesn't come from the Hymnal. The instruments will have strings rather than keys.

The point of all this is that just as things changed in Jesus' time, things also change in our time, and they do so for a reason; because people change.

I'm reminded of the story about a new priest who came to a parish, and met a man who said he had been a member of the parish for over fifty years. The Priest said, "I imagine you have seen a lot of changes over that time." The man said, "I certainly have, and I opposed every one of them."

#### **IV.**

I pray that our attitudes are different. I pray that we always can look for ways to reach out to our young people. And at times that might mean that every hymn we sing might not come from the Hymnal. And every prayer we say together might not be found in Book of Common Prayer. God still will be praised and worshipped either way.

Now, please don't take this as some sort of announcement that our traditions are going to start fading into the background. I like our traditions, and I know you feel the same way, and we still are going to honor them. But we all know there were times in the past when some things that we now call traditions were thought to be radical innovations by our ancestors.

And so I would urge us, as we celebrate our wonderful and very meaningful traditions in our worship, to recognize that those in the younger generation look at some things differently, as has been case throughout countless generations. And it is up to us to encourage and support them in their own creativity and development as we also welcome them into the worship that we hold so dear. *Amen.*