

I think that the most important thing I have learned in my time on Earth thus far is that we live in a both/and world. The foundation of existence, what we Christians call God, is paradoxical. What our intellect calls logic, breaks down. What seems reasonable is beyond reason. Think about the key doctrine of our religion, the Trinity. Three distinct persons of one substance. What does that mean? Wait, wait, wait, don't let your mind start thinking about that, its a rhetorical question. No one knows what the doctrine of the Trinity means, and I caution wariness towards anyone who claims otherwise. There is nothing more suspicious than someone who is certain about their religion doctrines, I am certain about that. But this is what makes it perfect teaching because the teaching teaches us in its own self. It is paradoxical, and the doctrine models the truth that it is expressing. Brilliant. And true.

Now we are just getting to know each other here at at St. Paul's. Martha and I are trying to figure out my roles here with you. I'll be up here on Sunday mornings serving at the Eucharist, I'll preach monthly, and in particular I'll be working with the Junior and Senior High youth groups. (Meeting next week after the brunch. More during announcements). We've go some good stuff lined up already. I go to vestry meetings and will be working with Martha on the Wednesday bible study and the Speaking of Anglicanism classes. In my other lives I am working on a

Doctorate of Ministry in the area of Agrarian Theology, a theology of community and sustainable agriculture, and Windy and I take care of Emery House in West Newbury. I hope to fold some of that work in my work here with you. In 2010ish, God and Bishop Tom willing, I'll be ordained to the diaconate and then the Priesthood and please, please, please, do not ask me what Windy and I will do after that! I am not quite sure what I am doing on Tuesday. I am here to help this church while learning. How fantastic.

“For wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Now one thing you need to know about me is that I spent a good many years with the Unitarians, I was very close to being ordained in that church. The Unitarians were good to me, they opened my eyes wide enough to find my way here, to the one true church... I got to preach a lot, but needless to say, I did not get much experience preaching from the lectionary, nor even the Bible. So bare with me for the next months as I learn my lectionary habits.

I read the scripture for this week, and we start with God's instructions to Moses about what to do and how to do it. Dress this way! Cook this way! Eat this way! Paul writes to the Roman Church about a similar theme. Do this to fulfill the law. Then Matthew relates basically a procedure of conflict resolution; step by step how

to adjudicate a conflict in the church, ending with the decree, “For wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

This got me thinking about church. I, as many of us do, have any uneasy relationship with the church. You’ll have to decide if this is a good condition for someone entering the clergy or not, but it is what it is and I have to be honest with that. Church is a place of paradox, much like GOD in God’s self, where we gather together in community and focus our attention individually on God. It is a fulfillment of the Great Commandment- loving God with all our heart and all our souls and loving our neighbor as ourself. Paul lifts that up to the Romans this week. And this is a basic paradox of religion, of church. We must come together in community, and at the same time there is the existential fact that we are alone. This thing that we call our self stands, like cheese, alone. We may be immersed in relationships of many kinds, but in the end, relationships must be seen as the interaction of different. Others. An exception is the condition of pregnancy. I do not have any personal experience of this, but in witnessing Windy and friends and family having children, there is a glorious bond that traverses the categories of self and other, that as far as I have seen, begins right away. I mean as soon as you are pregnant. Now, I am not saying that life begins at conception, I’ve only been here three weeks, I’m not going there, Tom Shaw once said about another topic, I’ll not

dine from that ditch... I'll defer to Barak Obama's answer to Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, who asked when does life begins, Obama said, "That's a question way past my pay grade." So beyond the fluidity of self and other in pregnancy, theologians teach us that generally, the place where it seems that the boundary between self and other dissolves is up that road that St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila point us, pure spiritual union. We call our final reconciliation with God perfect union, or maybe more accurately that state we find in perfect union, that condition of being in right relationship with the true nature of things, to be reconciled with the fabric of existence, maybe that is what we hazily label God. But until we are there, we're on our own and in community.

Now the paradox rests not only in the fact that in order to be in solitary right relationship with God we must be in communal right relationship with each other, but it also rests in the question why do we do all of this any way? Why do we come to church? Why do you come to church? Think about that for a moment. Why here? Now today in this weather, why not, there's nothing better to do... but really, why do we come to church?

This question has been floating around a lot recently in the Anglican world. This summer marked the Lambeth Conference, the gathering of the Bishops of the

entire worldwide Anglican communion that occurs every ten years. It was messy. Our neighbor bishop to the North, Gene Robinson, an openly gay man in relationship, and a regularly consecrated Episcopal Bishop, was not invited due to the divisiveness of his sexuality. Shame. A whole bunch of bishops from across the global south, now the heartland of Anglicanism (there are more Anglicans in Nigeria than any other country in the world), boycotted because even though Gene was not there, they couldn't attend a meeting of a church that would even let someone "like that" be a bishop. Shame. And there is a lot more involved around how we read the bible and what once and for all you must believe to consider yourself an Anglican... Urrgh. I have no patience for the trite bickering and petty proofs of fealty to Christ, because all of it pulls us kicking and screaming away from the point of coming together as Christians with Christ among us in the first place.

St. Ignatius tells us that everything we do must be done to glorify God. We can glorify God by making something beautiful, by singing magnificently, by building a grand cathedral. We can glorify God by worshiping with great dignity, an Anglican specialty. And that is good, glorifying God this way helps us focus our attention on what is a right and good and joyful thing, that is the point of liturgy. But glorification like this can be self fulfilling. I was looking through a churchy

catalogue recently and saw a chalice and paten set for \$9,000. Is that glorifying the Lord? Maybe. There is sacrifice in offering something so precious to God, but I don't know.

I think our presiding bishop, Katherine Jefferts-Schori said the most eloquent thing yet about the Anglican controversy, the "issue" so-called of homosexuality and what really glorifying God as a church means. A couple of big churches in Virginia announced that they were leaving the Episcopal church and she replied, that she wasn't concerned because such issues are inherently inward looking and that God calls us to church for the sake of the world, not the sake of the church. Church must be outward looking. When our efforts go to the preservation of the church and not the work of God in the world, we are excluding Christ from among us. It is a great paradox. We must come together in corporate worship, where communal, community effort edifies the soul's solitary relationship with the Almighty. We practice this relationship with God through practicing our relationships with others. We do this to save ourselves, yes, but we only save ourselves when we covenant to save the world. We can not, we must not focus inwardly on the church beyond what is necessary to provide the support for church communities and church people to focus outward into the world. It is our purpose.

It is our charge. It is the condition of our salvation in the eyes of God. It is a big, fat, hairy mess.

Christ is very clear that when we are gathered together in His name, He is among us. When we gather together solely to save ourselves, to secure up our finances, build endowments and buildings for their own sakes, Jesus is here, but he is sitting in the back of the sanctuary with tears in his eyes, heartbroken, maybe angry, and certainly disappointed. But when we embrace the paradox of Christian existence and we gather together to glorify God through justice and compassion radiating in great waves out from our efforts and institutions, Christ joins us at the Great Thanksgiving with joy in His heart. Let's make sure we have space for him up front here. AMEN