

This past Thursday, the faith leaders of Page were invited by our mayor to participate in a gathering in his office to discuss a program called "For Our City." "For Our City" is a statewide initiative set up by a group called Care, Inc., whose moniker is, "People Not Politics." The premise of "For Our City" is that the religious leaders in each town come together to form their own faith community. This faith community would form with the common denominator of service. The idea is that if the religious leaders of various traditions can work and serve together to help those in need in that community, transformative action will be the result, making Page a better place to live. The belief here is that despite our theological and dogmatic differences, all of us have a sacred text like the Beatitudes that we just heard. All of us understand that God blesses those in need and we are called as images of God to serve the disenfranchised.

The meeting on Thursday was a follow up to the Healing of Page breakfast meeting that we had as a community months ago. While many leaders in Page were invited to that meeting, the goal was to get participation from the faith leaders.

At the breakfast, we had a grand total of three faith leaders show up in this town of bountiful churches. This past Thursday, there were two of us, including me. There are, of course, many reasons why our community's faith leaders have not shown up at these meetings. But when Jon McHatton, the Arizona representative of Care, Inc., asked the other pastor at the meeting whether he thought he could get the evangelical

community on board with this, he responded, “probably not.” When asked why, he diverted us for a while suggesting that everyone was very busy. When I pushed him on this issue, he finally said, “they are nervous about anything that smacks of syncretism or ecumenism. They do not want anyone thinking that they condone what we, (and what he meant was you and me) are teaching and preaching.”

I think that is a fair assessment. This is very much a purity issue. There are some churches in this town who do not want to do anything with us, even if it is working together to help our neighbor, because they believe that by associating with us, they will be polluted. It is very similar to what was going on in the first century when Jesus first said “blessed are the poor, the hungry, and the thirsty.” It is difficult for us to understand just how inflammatory those words were when Jesus uttered them in the first century. When Jesus called them blessed, he is going against everything that Jews read in their Bibles.

The poor are poor, the Bible tells us, because they were being punished by God. Proverbs 10; “The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” And in today’s Psalm, “The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good.” Poverty was understood as a punishment from God, so when Jesus says that these people are blessed, he is stepping right on one of the central theologies of his faith. When Jesus suggests that we should welcome the poor back into our midst, he is met with stunned silence.

As far as I am concerned, this is one of the central sins that we continue to

commit as so called religious folk. Separating ourselves from those who disagree with us or are different from us flies in the face of what Jesus teaches us, not just in the Beatitudes, but throughout the Gospels. But it is something that churches have become very proficient at doing. That's why we have so many individual churches and denominations and that's why pastors are afraid to show up at a meeting to discuss how to care for the poor in our community. We might even be better at polarizing each other into separate camps than politicians have been, and it's hard to believe that anybody could be better at this than politicians. This has been even more true in the last 25 years than it has been in the past. Political operatives have actually used alienation as a strategy in winning an election. Whether it is occurring in political circles or religious ones, I am sick to death of demonizing people who do not agree with us on an issue. I am sick to death of politicians and religious leaders who tell us that we should not even sit in the same room with those who believe differently than we do. That's why I desperately want the "For Our City" idea to fly in Page. That's why here at St. David's we continue to do all in our power to create situations where we can be with people of other faith traditions and philosophies. That's what our Lessons and Carols Program, our Good Friday ecumenical service, our Passover meal with the Jewish community are all about. It is in part what our social ministry, The Circle of Page, is all about.

That is why when I step into the voting booth on Tuesday, my very first priority in choosing our next President will be selecting the candidate that I believe will work to end this detestable practice of demonizing the people who disagree with you. I will be

choosing the candidate who I believe is attempting to find common ground on the most polarizing issues in this country. Both candidates have suggested a desire to end partisan bickering and come together. But I want the person who will make this their central priority in office. I want the candidate who will offer us the best chance to live into The Beatitudes, the candidate who I think truly believes that the poor and the hungry are blessed by God. I want the candidate who believes that we must talk to one another despite our differences, indeed, because of our differences. The candidate who believes we can find common ground on the most contentious issues facing this country.

Now let us, in the spirit of cooperation and living into the Beatitudes, say for a second that someone is elected on Tuesday who actually does want to end polarization and demonization of one another. And let us also then go out on a very long limb, and put away our cynicism for a moment, and suggest that this person will actually break the political mold and live into such an approach to government. I know that history does not bode well for that prospect. But let's say, it actually happens. What would that mean to us? What would that mean to us as the church?

The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, Bishop of North Carolina, asked this question when I was in New Orleans. Now consider that Michael, perhaps the most gifted black preacher in the Episcopal church, was speaking to a room of almost exclusively black Episcopalians. The only Anglo faces in that hall were the 20 or so of us gathered in the same hotel for the Ministry Innovator's Conference who were not of color. Bishop Curry said, "perhaps this is going to get me kicked out of this hall, but religion in this potential

age of transformation in politics, means that we are going to have possibilities we have never had before. But it also means that we need to truly live into our call to make disciples of others. We are not called to make these people Episcopalians, he said, but we are called to bring them to God. "In this age, he said, we are called to affirm who we are, but we are also called to go BEYOND where we have been. We are called to make disciples of ALL nations.

The Bishop went on to talk about St. Luke's in Tarboro, N.C., an historically black Episcopal church, that rewrote its mission statement and actually became an inclusive church, open to everyone. No longer is St. Luke's a black church, it is now an Episcopal church, full of people of all colors and no color.

I believe that we truly are on the cusp of a transformation in this country and in the world. Many have grown sick of partisan politics and partisan religion. We are going to have the opportunity to actually begin to speak to one another and work with one another. We have the potential to knock down the wall between Republicans, Democrats and Independents, and the same wall that has been built to separate Americans from the rest of the world. But this also just may be the greatest opportunity in my lifetime to end the most segregated hour in America even today, the hour we spend in church on Sunday. We have the opportunity to create a national church that is like St. David's, a place where all are truly welcome no matter their dogma, race or sexual orientation. We have the greatest opportunity in my life to create the kingdom of God in our midst, to truly live into the Beatitudes.

As Anglicans, we are in the most unique of positions to live into this

transformative age. That's because our tradition teaches us how this can be accomplished. Our faith tradition was founded on accepting multiple opinions and worshiping together despite our differences. We can, we should, we must be on the forefront of changing not only our churches, but all churches, mosques and temples of every stripe.

There is no better place to begin this journey into acceptance of the other than now on All Saints Sunday. The issue of saints has divided Christianity from at least the second council of Nicea in 787. Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians have always seen saints as an integral part of faith, but in the eighth century they had a fight about how and if those saints should be venerated. Were icons windows to God, as the Orthodox said, or were people worshipping idols?

Then during the Reformation, Protestants vehemently and completely rejected the idea of saints all together. Martin Luther's language in rejecting the cult of saints and relics of those saints was downright caustic. "What lies there", he said, are about relics! One claims to have a feather from the wing of the angel Gabriel, and the Bishop of Mainz has a twig from Moses' burning bush. And how does it happen that 18 apostles are buried in Germany when Christ had only 12?" Really setting off Luther, was the fact that the church displayed these relics today, on All Saints Day. For the right price, the pope would then reduce your time in purgatory on All Saints Day.

Of course, Martin Luther was right. But where he went wrong is where we all go wrong. He demonized his opposition. Luther wanted and succeeded in having the entire notion of saints thrown out of the newly forming Protestant tradition. And to this

day, many Protestants, including some of us here, cringe at the whole notion of sainthood. That is a classic case of throwing the baby out with the bath water, which is what always happens when we polarize ourselves from everyone who holds a different point of view. After all, it is the phrase communion of saints that links all of us to the most meaningful parts of Christianity and the very core of our faith. Do we have to reject all that because of the Catholic church's indulgence abuses?

Tomorrow is the feast day of one of the saints in the Anglican tradition. His name is Richard Hooker. In the 16th century, Hooker articulated for the first time how being Anglican was different than being Roman Catholic or reformed Protestant. The central fight at the time centered around the abuses that were occurring in the Roman church, specifically the stance that salvation was only possible through the church itself, through the dispensation of sacraments. Martin Luther totally rejected this theology with the famous phrase, "sola scriptura." The Bible alone, Luther said, is the mediator between ourselves and God. To this day that remains the central difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. That's why the saints were expunged from Protestant churches. But our friend Richard Hooker suggested something else. He articulated a faith using the now famous analogy of the three legged stool. Yes, scripture is central to the Anglican faith, but not solely scripture, as Luther contended. Just as important Hooker said, was our 1600 years of tradition. It's not just the Bible that makes us Christian, it is all those people who followed. Hooker was unwilling to throw out the pantheon of saints because they are our connection to our past. Without tradition, our faith cannot evolve.

Richard Hooker taught us that Anglicanism offers a new path. No longer do we need to suggest that Catholics are evil because they have statues of saints. No longer do we need to suggest that Protestants are evil because they reject the legacy of David of Wales, our patron saint, or Mary Magdalene or Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. or Sojourner Truth. As Episcopalians, we have found a way to honor both traditions and see the good in each.

This is exactly the approach to religion and relationship that we have to offer the world. Our tradition shows us the clear path to ending the polarization that is slowly killing all of us. In the transformative age of our next President, we have the opportunity to live into our tradition of loving and accepting the other as never before. We can participate in creating a new society in which people from other nations will no longer hate us but can work with us in solving the most critical issues of our time. And as Anglicans, we are in the unique position of being able to show the world how this is done.

In the transformative age of our next President, we have the greatest opportunity in my lifetime to bring the people of the world together and truly live into the Beatitudes, lifting up those who have previously been polarized and marginalized.

Let us grasp this major opportunity and begin to create the world we have all dreamed about. Let us live those Beatitudes every day and bring about God's kingdom. Let us remember that all of us truly are related, that all of us really are descended from one black woman in Africa. Let us once and for all put an end to the false divisions of Republican and Democrat, Catholic and Protestant, Evangelical and

mainline, Muslim and Buddhist, American and European, Navajo and Anglo, gay and straight, rich and poor. Let us become the people that Jesus envisions in today's Gospel and embrace and love one another in our difference, so that when the history books are written, they will say, that was the day, that was the time when everything started to change for the better. That can be our legacy. Let us go forth and make the transformative age we have all dreamed about a reality. Amen.