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All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God, who is above us, within us and beside us. Amen.

Good morning! Only eight weeks ago today, I left here after the morning service and some lunch, and embarked on a month-long adventure in Florence, Italy, supplying at St. James Episcopal Church for Mark Dunnam, the Rector, while he was on sabbatical. Most of you already know that, and some of you heard me tell about some parts of that in a sermon a couple of weeks ago. That month changed my life in many ways. But I want to talk about some of the things that have happened in the other three and a half weeks, not in terms of their chronological order - the world's time - but in terms of kairos - God's time. They, too, have changed my life.

As many of you know, more than a dozen of us from All Saints and many more from our diocese, made the pilgrimage to Hayneville, AL last Saturday to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of Jonathan Myrick Daniels, an Episcopal seminarian who was killed saving a young African-American girl from the shotgun blast of an angry white man. There were an estimated 1500 or so pilgrims there - not as many as at Ladd Stadium Friday night - but a goodly number, nonetheless. People came from all over the country - we met pilgrims from New Jersey and New York, Georgia, Washington, DC, Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Mississippi, Florida, both Carolinas and Tennessee. There were over two dozen bishops there; priests, deacons, laypeople; men and women; rich and poor; black and white; children in strollers and people 'of a certain age.'

We walked from the courthouse, to the jail, to the place where the shooting happened and back to the courthouse - and they were all on the same block! We told a part of the story of Jonathan and his co-workers at each place where we stopped; we sang and we prayed and there was time for silence. We shared the solemnity of the reason we were there and we shared our lives with each other as we traveled, despite the shortness of the journey. And we ate together as a family in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In other words, it was a Big, Fat Episcopal Wedding!

The experiences of last weekend have stayed with me as I've looked at pictures posted by all sorts of people who were there. And I have read more about Jonathan Daniels than ever before - more stories seem to have been posted online

than I can remember in previous years, perhaps because of the significance of this particular anniversary. It is an important story for all of us to know, not just for those of us in the South, but for all of us who struggle with the realities of a broken world in which justice and love do not always seem to win the day.

We have to tell our stories over and over, so that we all can remember them, and so our children know what is important about our life together. Maybe that is why the writer of John has Jesus repeat his words about the Bread of Life so many times - because it is one of the most important things to know about Jesus. All our stories are important - yours, mine, Jonathan's, Jesus's - not because they show us how different we are from one other, but because they reinforce the bonds we all share as members of the one human family. As Jim said last week, we all "suffer and exult and succeed and fail and love and grieve" together - all of us, intimately connected as family.

I think it is this connection, too, that has led me this week to other discoveries. When the pilgrims returned to the courthouse after the walk to the jail and back, many of us climbed the stairs up to the courtroom where the Eucharist was to be held. Others stayed below, at ground level, to watch the service on TV screens set up in large tents on the lawn. The courtroom and the tents were quickly filled, and I was unable to find a place where I could hear Presiding Bishop-elect Michael Curry's sermon. To be precise, I could hear his voice - he is not a quiet, calm, stay-in-one-place kind of preacher - but I couldn't understand a word of it.

It was more than a little frustrating, because I could also hear a lot of laughter and applause!

I spent a good bit of time in vain Sunday and Monday looking on line for a video or a transcript of the sermon. Monday night, Dottie Dunnam, over in Florence, sent me a message asking if I had seen Bishop Curry's sermon online yet. I replied that I had not, that I was looking for it and that I would send her the link as soon as I came across it. Not more than a minute later, she replied that someone else had just sent her the link, so she sent it to me! (From Mobile to Florence and back to Mobile - it's a very small world.)

I immediately went to the YouTube link and started to watch. (If you haven't watched it yet, you are missing something! I have posted it on the All Saints Facebook page.) It is 30 minutes long - that's about 3 times longer than anything I

preach, and at least a thousand times more exciting!! Bishop Michael tells the story of the people of God - that's us, you know -- in a way that will make you laugh, make you cry, make you clap and make you want to shout, "Amen!" - not only at the end, but all the way through! The man is on fire for Jesus - and we'd better get ready - 'cause he wants us to be on fire for Jesus, too!

Bishop Michael's wants us to know that Jesus didn't come to establish the Church (with a Capital 'C') - he came to establish a Movement. He says that he is convinced that God came among us in the person of Jesus in order to

"show us the way to be reconciled with the God who deeply and passionately loves each and every one of us, ...and to be reconciled and right with each other as the children of that one God who created us all...He came to show us [...] how to become more than simply the human race - that's not good enough - [he] came to show us how to be more than a collection of individualized self-interests, [...] [he] came to show us how to become the human family of God."

And that, he says, "is our hope and our salvation..."

To say it another way, Bishop Michael quotes Max Lucado, a Christian writer, who says, "God loves you just the way you are, but he doesn't intend to leave you that way."

Our job is to change the world - to transform it - to heal it - to love it -- and the way that will happen is through reconciliation.

From Bishop Michael's sermon, I was led to another sermon on YouTube.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bv2fX1s6l90>) Now, just in case the idea of our next Presiding Bishop preaching like - well, like someone who is on fire for Jesus - is making you a little uncomfortable (you know, because Episcopalians don't show their emotions), let me refer you to our current Presiding Bishop, who, in a sermon at General Convention last month, talked about the 'finger-waggers' who say that our church is dying. She said, "This church will find new life by crossing old boundaries and exploring new territories."

The Gospel lesson was about the woman who had the 12-year hemorrhage, and the daughter of Jairus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Bishop Katharine likened the Church to those stories.

She said the Church "will continue rising from the dead if we keep crossing into new territories, in our back yards, prisons, city parks, and pockets of despair, here and across the globe. If we believe, if we're faithful, we know that the ancient truth remains, and resurrection is always emerging from death. That healing may cost plenty of blood, sweat, and tears - but it is rooted in the firm belief that God does enlighten, heal and deliver."

And she said this to the people of the Church gathered: "Pay no attention to the finger-wagging. Turn around and look for the hem of Jesus' robe. Go searching in new territory. Reach out and touch what is clothing the image of God. Give your heart to that search and you will not only find healing but become healing. Share what you find and you will discover the abundant life for which all God's children have been created."

And if church sermons don't grab you, here's one last thing to consider: I guess I'll have to say that I was led to the JJP production of the musical, Avenue Q, on Friday night. It was, sort of, like Bishop Michael's sermon - something that made you laugh, made you cry, made you clap, and made you want to shout, "Amen!" In the second act, "The Money Song" led one of the main characters to discover his purpose in life. The words of the refrain hit me like a two-by-four to the head: "When you help others, you can't help helping yourself! When you do good deeds, you're also serving your own needs."

So, let's get going! Be the Body! Transform. Heal. Reach out. Love. Catch fire!
Amen!