

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8 C)
Bruton Parish Episcopal Church
The Rev. Ronald P. Jaynes, Interim Rector
Sunday, June 27, 2010

Pick up the Mantle

The kids of in our Sunday School class today are hearing the story called 'Pick up the Mantle.'

Obviously it is about Elijah and his reluctant disciple Elisha. Elijah with his departure via Chariots of Fire, left behind his mantle, the powerful symbol of his prophetic work for Elisha to pick up and carry on the work God had for him to do.

Elisha was more than a little worried about trying to take the place of the strong and fearsome leader Elijah.

We sang this morning about Elijah's mantle o'er Elisha cast.

This is an ordination hymn and the image of Elijah and Elisha speaks of the succession of people God finds to carry on God's work in the world. But the hymn should make us shutter if we really believed that God will 'make each one stronger, nobler than the last.'

The Search Committee of Bruton has begun to receive names of priests to be considered for the post of Rector.

There are many qualities they will be looking for in that person. Certainly they are looking for a person who is prepared for the solemn tasks ahead; they probably would not be interested in a person who stated on their resume that he or she was 'stronger and nobler' than those who came before.

Carl Daw, an Episcopal priest who I believe once taught at William and Mary, wrote the other verse we sang. It speaks of the ordained person working and praying alongside all the people of God to carry out those solemn tasks God sets before us.

There will be a mantle for that new priest to pick up, but the tasks ahead will only be accomplished as each member of this body picks up theirs. 'Through them,' wrote Carl Daw, "thy Church presents in word and deed Christ's one true sacrifice with thankful praise."

Each age has its tasks and this age has large ones. We don't live in the world many of us were born into, when everyone went to church, when everyone would have at least heard the name Elijah and would recognize it as a Bible name. We live in an age in which most people, especially those

under age 50, don't go to church very often if at all. And there is the challenge. There is the Mantle to be picked up, for we have a message of hope and joy to share with this world, in our age.

We are blessed here at Bruton that countless numbers of people come into our church every day ... our Guides welcome them every day, and we who worship here welcome them on Sundays.

Often our guides tell me about the questions people ask, their interest in the most basic facts about the church.

It is our joy to introduce visitors, not just to a house of God, but to the love of God. Sure, they want to know where George or Thomas sat, but we have more than that to share.

Our Episcopal Church has some very special ways to introduce people to Jesus and his love. It is a solemn, but joyful, task.

We have what Louis Weil calls: "A non-papal expression of the catholic faith." We have sacramental worship, which means we use our whole selves, body and mind and spirit, to give praise to God ... sometime people joke and say we are 'catholic lite.' But there is much more to us than that. Beauty is something we see in all of creation, and beauty is part and parcel of our worship.

We are what Dean Roberts of Denver called years and years ago "the thinking man's church" (he wouldn't mind if we change that to thinking person's church). For over forty years we've been using our minds and our hearts to work out in concrete ways what it means to honor the Christ in every person - living out what Presiding Bishop Browning said so many years ago that in the Episcopal Church there are no outcasts. It's not easy, and often lands us strong criticism from Archbishops in other countries, but here we are The Episcopal Church Welcomes You. I love that sign. Because, and only because, we believe it's true.

Why is it so hard for us to let that message out? Why are we not overflowing with enthusiasm for our church and its willingness to tackle every difficult question that faces human beings? Why are we not excited to let people know that we are a church where our members have many different answers to those questions and don't insist that we see things the same way?

We look at our flaws and say we have nothing to offer, nothing for God to use. Well, I love this summery of Biblical characters and their flaws, and how they overcame them to do wonderful things for God.

This comes from a pastor named Tom Cox. You may have heard it before: What's your excuse? Abraham was old. Jacob was insecure. Leah was unattractive. Moses stuttered. Gideon was poor. Rahab was immoral. David had an affair resulting in all kinds of family problems. Elijah was suicidal. Jeremiah was depressed. Jonah was reluctant. Naomi was a widow. Peter was impulsive. Martha worried a lot. The Samaritan woman had several failed marriages. Zacchaeus was crooked. Thomas had doubts. Paul had poor health. And Timothy was, well... timid.

That's quite a variety of misfits, yet God used each of them – and God will use you, too, if you stop making excuses and ... pick up your mantle.

Clergy and lay people together ... believing that 'each age for thine own solemn task prepares' ... that is our prayer for of our vocations.