The Tenets of Church of the Saviour

April 7, 2024  
Gail Arnall

Texts:  
 John 20: 19-23  
 Acts 4:13

I want to begin my teaching by starting with the conclusion. It is actually found in the brochure that you have at your seat called “Faith in Action.” I will be focusing on page two of the brochure because these are the four tenets of our church. Which is to say that by coming to this church, you are expressing your strong belief that these four tenets are important and worth even the sacrificial love that may be required.

Four tenets at Church of the Saviour account for the incredible works in social justice that have blossomed over the past seventy-five years.

Call  
We believe that everyone is called to do something in our world in response to God's gifts to us. It is the church community's job to help individuals find their calls and nurture them into being.

Gifts  
We believe that everyone has gifts and no one has all the gifts. The church community must help each person identify their gifts and help them find a place to use them. Gifts range from preaching to hospitality to organizational skills to humor. All gifts are welcomed and needed.

Inward/Outward Journey  
Church of the Saviour ministries begin and are sustained by a commitment to the inward and outward journey of each member. Daily Bible study, meditation and prayer are essential. Silent Retreats, book studies and accountability in mission groups sustain the balance in the inward and outward life.

Community  
Belonging to a worship community provides the larger context of God's ongoing creation of justice and mercy for ALL. Each CoS community provides a group of people who share this faith journey and will encourage and hold us accountable. Although mission may be hard, there is joy and celebration at the core of a committed community.

OK, let’s go back to scripture. I spent this week thinking how disappointed the disciples must have been once Jesus was crucified and buried. I can imagine that they felt like it was all for nothing, that all their hopes and dreams were now demolished. I noticed that they gathered all together in a room. That is to say, they knew that in community they would find solace and perhaps encouragement to move forward. Seems to me that community is important if we are to be about the work that Jesus started so long ago. They modeled that for us. I wonder what they did as they talked among themselves. Did they even then begin to sense that there was something calling them to a different reality than just the death of their leader.

And then we’re told that Jesus appeared. Whether you believe he appeared physically or not doesn’t really matter. He appeared in order to say, “Peace be with you.” That’s what they heard. He said later on that he would send the Holy Spirit to be his placeholder and helper in their hearts. This suggests to me that each of those men – and the followers that were to come – would have to be in touch with their inner selves. That means that if we, as followers of Jesus, are to truly follow in his footsteps, we’re going to have to have an inward journey. He went on to commission his followers to go around the world and teach this gospel message to everyone. That sounds like an outward journey to me. We have to figure that each of these men had particular gifts and that those gifts enable them to respond to God’s call on their life. I doubt that we would even know about Jesus and Christianity if these initial followers had not responded to the outward call on their lives. All of this in the midst of incredible disappointment, anxiety, anger, frustration, and doubt. But bubbling up was a notion that, okay, we have to continue the work

In one of the 20th century’s worst wars, World War II, a young chaplain named Gordon Cosby was with men as they approached Omaha Beach. His experiences prior to that, and through that ordeal, led him to a realization that people needed more than just a ritual to order their lives by; they needed to understand how profound God’s love is for them, and that they, in fact, are children of God. He fashioned the notion for a church. He came back to Washington, DC, and with the help of eight people formed Church of the Saviour. This little band decided it would be important to have a School of Christian Living. One man signed up, and Gordon taught him each week. After a year he moved to Ohio. Nevertheless, the School of Christian Living took root and became critical as a growing number of people came to realize that there needed to be a continuing effort to strengthen their understanding of God and God’s work in the world.

A few years later, five women said: You know, what we need is a silent retreat center so that we really can take seriously this idea of an inward journey. They went looking and found what we now call Dayspring. Nobody had any money, but a few people owned their houses, and so they took out mortgages in order to buy the 200 acres with a farmhouse on it. Silent Retreats began.

Twenty years later two women, Barbara Moore and Terry Flood, became very concerned about the living conditions of people living in the Adams-Morgan area. They decided they needed to buy a building. They were cautioned by all sorts of people that this was not a good idea. They bought the building anyway. And that led eventually to Jubilee Housing which owns and operates twelve high rise buildings offering affordable housing in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood.

Some years later two women, Marja Hilfiker and Gail Boss Koopman, were concerned that so many people in DC did not have their high school certificate or GED. So they started a tutoring program right down the street to help people get their GEDs. That led to the creation of the Academy of Hope which is now the largest purveyor of GEDs in the city each year.

I could keep going and, if you open that brochure, you’ll see about 32 ministries that started with one or two people who said:

* we need to worry about early childhood education;
* we need to help people get jobs;
* we’re concerned with people's health;
* we’re concerned that people are not able to buy their own houses and so we want to make that possible;
* we are concerned that people with AIDs have no place to go when they are sick;
* we are concerned about low income, homeless families who don’t qualify for the subsidies that the city offers and, so Carol Bullard-Bates set up Bethany House.
* We have a Recovery Café ministry in response to that awful addiction to drugs and alcohol.
* A handful of people, including Elizabeth O’Connor, started Sarah Circle to offer low income seniors a lovely place to live.
* In her capacity as a doctor at Children’s Hospital, Ann Barnet saw too many infants being born weighing less than 4 pounds. She kept feeling that something needed to be done. She issued a call in 1980 and two other women joined with her to start the Family Place.

I assure you that none of the people that set up these ministries thought at the beginning that they would be building any kind of organization, much less the size of the organizations that have evolved. They were simply responding to a call on their lives to do something about the concern they kept feeling over and over. This week in the *Weekly Gospel Reflection*, Marjory Bankston wrote that Gordon Cosby used to say that call is “big, impossible and persistent.” I remember Mary Cosby saying, “A call is something I cannot not do.”

Hear Acts 4:13 again:

13When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

It is a tradition of Church of the Saviour that if you have a Call, you need to find at least one other person to share in that call. Then you present that Call to our church community to get our blessing and perhaps even financial support, along with ideas and resources. I think the disciples went out two by two didn’t they?

I want to focus specifically on the idea of Call as we begin to think about our Recommitment Sunday scheduled for May 17th. We, like others before us, are in the midst of incredible disappointment, anxiety, anger, frustration, and doubt about what is happening in our world and in our country. But, we are not alone. We have a community, and we have the leading of the Holy Spirit.

So, what is it that God is calling you to do right now? Is it to be a volunteer in some existing organization? Is it to be on the board of an existing organization? Is it to start a one-on-one program with people in your neighborhood? As you know, Eighth Day is lay-led. Nobody gets paid. That means we have positions of leadership that need to be filled every two years. We’re coming up to the time when we will be identifying those leaders. I hope you will give some thought to whether or not you would like to stand up and say:

* Yes, I’d like to be the person that coordinates worship.
* Or I’d like to be the person that focuses on the educational needs of our community.
* Or I’d like to be a teacher and offer classes so that we can grow in our spiritual formation.

My hope is that you will give this serious attention in the next couple of months as we prepare for Recommitments Sunday and the selection of our Leadership Team in following weeks. If you want to talk about this I can volunteer, and I know David Hilfiker is already a counselor to many of us. If you’re not clear what the leadership opportunities are, please talk to me or Kathy Doan. As Kathy often says: “Everybody is a crew member on this ship; we don’t have passengers.”

So this is the way it works in Eighth Day. You have aligned yourself with a great tradition: we affirm that everyone has gifts; everyone is Called to some type of ministry; all of us must nurture our inward journey and find a way to express God’s love in an outward journey; and that community is essential to our ability to live out faithfully God’s call on our lives.