

Sermon: May 18, 2018 The Rev. Alexander McCurdy III

“And I, when I am lifted from the earth, will bring all people to myself.” John 12:33

At our 9:15 service most every Sunday, we excuse the children in grades 5 and under for the “Children’s sermon” in the undercroft. One of the clergy, Frank less frequently, has the delightful task of leading that. Meanwhile, we have the adult sermon upstairs.

Truth be told, however, theological truth that is, the real children’s sermon upstairs.

I take St. Paul’s word on that where he says in Romans 8: “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” Likewise here—you, we are the children of God because we are being led by the spirit of God. Other people in this world are not children of God, but *only* in the sense that they don’t yet know about the Holy Spirit of God at work in them and their worlds.

Still, it might sound presumptuous to join St Paul in declaring ourselves to be the children of God. But it’s not, if we make another thing clear. In understanding ourselves as children of God we can only do so in utter humility, in awe and awareness of our unworthiness in saying so. But indeed, we followers of Christ—stumble though we may or fall asleep at the wheel: we are the children of God Paul is speaking about.

And yes, absolutely the people of Israel were and are too, being the original chosen children of God. We Christians do believe they missed the ball in not yet believing, much less understanding, our God’s humble incarnation, miserable death and glorious resurrection. Oh but some day they will, those ever-dear and original children of God.

“And I, when I am lifted from the earth, will bring all people to myself.”

Sometimes we children of God, who follow Christ as best we can, lose the sense of being led by the Holy Spirit, our vision dimmed by life’s difficulties. But be sure: the spirit is still leading you then. Even as you are burdened by “the sufferings of this present time” the Holy Spirit is searching for a way to make you aware “that these present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the Glory that shall be revealed.”

I know some of you out there are enduring moments like that now—or have in the distant or not so distant past. Don’t lose that consciousness that God is with you in your trials and tribulations. Look for the Spirit reaching out for you in perilous times. Protect that small flame of awareness of whose children you are, the children of God being led by the Spirit of God.

And protect the notion the we are particular in that we are blessed right now to know God’s wonderful plan for humanity, in this time between the times—in these measly couple of thousand years between God’s first Parousia—his first physical and spiritual appearance after Easter—and his final appearance coming right smack around the corner of God’s time.

“And I, when I am lifted from the earth, will bring all people to myself.”

That the Holy Spirit is leading us may not be obviously or immediately apparent to us or others. Its leading is mysterious and right now in this room, every one of us are here because yes,

we decided to come, but also we were led by the Holy Spirit to come. All of us. This too, is our election—the elect of God, the children of God.

But lest we ever forget: we're not elected because we are any more special to God than any other of his creatures. Any specialness we have is a matter of the knowledge of God we have been given. We are Children of God, because we know about God in his actions and intentions. Others don't yet, but oh my friends they will!

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

For the moment, we're the ones who've seen the preview, tasted the cake before it's cut.

But let us never forget the sweet taste of that cake comes with a responsibility to work along with the Holy Spirit leading us. We are the elect because we are elected to do this job of communication, not only to glory in our “elected-ness”.

In electing Abraham and the people of Israel, their job was to make God and his ways known. They fell down on the job when they basked in their election and neglected their mission. God sent one prophet after another to remind the Chosen people what they were chosen for.

So with us, we need reminding. We have an outreach commission here at St David's with some hard working folk on it. But in fact, we are all on that commission. Surely as we go about reaching out, we have to be who we are, individually and collectively.

Most of us are not the type to knock on doors or stand on busy street corners preaching the Gospel, although it might be worth giving more than a moment's thought as to why we aren't.

That said, Christ's mission happens first among ourselves. In caring gestures, in reaching out to those suffering, in laughing and sharing together in this place, bearing each other's burdens. Acts of kindness large and small. That's the fundamental ground of outreach.

Then, out in the world, we don't have to be belligerent about the Gospel, only gentle.

Recently a very well-intentioned Christian lady all but backed me up against a wall repeating the insistent question: “But have you publically accepted Jesus as your Lord and savior ...have you done it publically, at the altar!” Zeal for Christ can have its odd manifestations.

But here among us, I see people reaching out in love quietly, gently, yet firmly to others. We have people hurting here, right here today and as any one of you is made known of it, you reach out in the name of Christ's love. You affirm that God's still mightily holding them, that somehow in Paul's words: “All things will work out for good, for those who love God.” Yes, all things—not some things, all things.

And for any of us who might look at someone and doubt that the person is being led by the Spirit of God, let me remind you that looks can be deceiving. I recall how 57 years ago at the beginning of seminary at the venerable Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, the dean addressed the student body, about 120 of us, dressed in black robes seated in chapel alphabetically. He told us that it might be tempting over time to doubt the other guy's vocation to the priesthood. “Don't do it,” he said; “you'll be wrong.”

Likewise with us it's a temptation: "What!! He...She's being led by the Spirit of God! Now wait a minute!" Oh if I could tell you the details of how I was whacked over the head by God last week as I had entertained such a doubt about someone. I almost fell out of my chair when I found out how the Holy Spirit had been silently leading this person: silently, secretly, but powerfully.

"And I, when I am lifted from the earth, will bring all people to myself."

And oh, you children of God: don't ever doubt that eventual act of God's Holy Spirit when all people will bend the knee to Christ: "those in heaven, those on earth and those under the earth" as St Paul put it or as the writer of Psalm 22 put it. "All who go down to the dust shall fall before him." All.

"And I, when I am lifted from the earth, will bring all people to myself."

So—here ends the children's sermon. Time for recess with milk and cookies!

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen