

Sermon 24B
The Rev. Wendy D. Cliff
St. Stephen's, Belvedere

October 18, 2015

[Job 38:1-7](#)

[Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c](#)

[Hebrews 5:1-10](#)

[Mark 10:35-45](#)

Yesterday was the end of the Diocese of California's two-day annual convention where leadership within our diocese is exercised in a very unique way. And it just so happens that our scripture passages for today are all about leadership, power, and control. In the reading from Job, God is sarcastically responding to Job's laments and questions by saying, "Look Buddy, you have no idea what my job is all about." The psalm is about God as the ultimate designer and architect of creation. The letter from Hebrews talks specifically about the priesthood and Jesus being the penultimate example of divine leadership consecrated through suffering, sacrifice, and submission. And finally, Mark's gospel emphasizes once again, the notion of servant leadership with the first being last and the last being first. So how does the Episcopal Church approach power and control? This is going to be more of a teaching sermon, and it may be new information for some of you, or a review for others. I think it's important to do a little "Episcopal Church 101," looking at what leadership looks like in our tradition, given that we're in the middle of searching for a new rector to lead us.

So let's start with you: How many of you grew up in the Episcopal Church?

Do you remember when you first recognized or considered the Episcopal Church your spiritual home as an adult?

Now think about what you love about the Episcopal Church, not St. Stephen's in particular, but the Episcopal Church as a faith tradition.

I've heard people say that they've come into and stayed with the Episcopal Church for reasons such as our beautiful liturgy and music, the progressive theology, the openness to questions, and the rich, deep spirituality. People also love how the Episcopal Church is present all around the world. How many of you have worshipped

in an Episcopal church in a foreign country? It's true, we can worship in an Episcopal church in such places as Rome, Haiti, and San Pedro Sula in Honduras.

Connectedness and interconnection are central aspects of the Episcopal tradition.

You see, we are not what's called a congregational tradition. No one Episcopal church stands alone. There's a deep interconnected structure in our tradition. Although St. Stephens's has a lot of autonomy, we can't do some things without consulting our bishop or the canons, which are the laws that govern our faith tradition. And in much the same way, no diocese in the Episcopal Church stands alone; they have to consult with the larger body of dioceses in our country. Although we are individuals here today, we are also connected with other Christians throughout the world through the Anglican Communion. Our diocese has both formal and informal relationships with people in provinces such as: Brazil, Guatemala, Malawi, Kenya, New Zealand, and Hong Kong, among others.

Our "national church," The Episcopal Church, also has three international dioceses covering 17 nations including Ecuador, Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Europe, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, Taiwan, the Virgin Islands, and Venezuela. That's the macro. Now for the micro.

The Diocese of California is one of the 109 dioceses in the Episcopal Church. You may know that although we are called the Diocese of California, there are also five other dioceses within the state. And within the Diocese of California there are six deaneries covering Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, and Southern Alameda counties; with the Peninsula Deanery consisting of all of San Mateo County and a small portion of Santa Clara County.

And in those deaneries within the diocese, did you know there are 82 congregations? How many Episcopalians would you estimate in our portion of the state? There are approximately 27,000 Episcopalians in Dio Cal. Some of those Episcopalians don't come to church every week, but most of them feel connected to the worship, the theology and beliefs, and the many ministries of outreach and compassion in our congregations.

So how do these Episcopalians share leadership? At some time before this weekend, each church, whether a parish with a rector (full-time priest) or a mission with a vicar (part-time priest) held it's Annual Meeting. At that time, each

congregation elected from 2 to 7 lay people as their representatives to the deanery and to diocesan Convention. St. Stephen's delegates at convention this past weekend were Joe Jennings, Kathryn Lowell, and Darryl Deviney. Also at Convention were Janet Brown who serves on the Investment Committee, Bob McCaskill how serves as the Treasurer for the diocese, and Joe Jennings wears another hat as a member of the Executive Committee. Forgive me if I have missed anyone else who was also there yesterday. You should ask them about their experiences at coffee hour. Almost 600 people, lay and ordained, gathered at Grace Cathedral over the past two days. Together, we prayed, worshipped, discerned, and voted together. We learned about ministries across the diocese and beyond. This year, the big issues we voted on were about environmentally responsible investing and mental health advocacy and education.

Coming together as a governing body for the "work" of convention is not for everyone. Not everyone likes the "politics" of our church: the passion of the resolutions, the parsing of parliamentary procedures, and the counting of votes, but the democratic process for our church is important and unique. It was crafted during the time of our country's founding leaders, reflecting the system of checks and balances and a love-hate relationship with monarchies.

The Episcopal Church's democratic process is also representative of our connectedness. We are connected because of the way we share together in decision-making about what is important to us. No one person – not the warden, not the rector, not the bishop – can make certain decisions: we all can have a voice in some of what we collectively say and do.

We are also interconnected because of the financial contributions that each congregation makes to the life, to all the lives, of our diocese, much like the annual pledges we are collecting at St. Stephen's right now.

But those are not the only ways we are share together. The Episcopal Church is called hierarchical because it is organized by ranks of "orders" – there are lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons. The word "Episcopal" comes from the Latin word "*episcopalis*" which means bishop. So Episcopalian means "of or relating to a bishop." We often think of the bishop "on top" of a pyramid – perhaps because there is only one

(or two); but you can also think of an inverted pyramid with the bishop on the bottom because there are thousands of the rest of us.

For his leadership, Bishop Marc has asked us to consider not a pyramid at all, but rather a hill or mountain – with a fantastic view – of which there are many in this diocese. He is not alone on the top of the mountain. We all have a role in oversight of our diocese. We're up there together, it's a place from which we each have a view, an outlook; and no one of us sees the same. He calls this a "shared Episcopate."

Clearly Bishop Marc is the bishop and has many specific roles, but he is not the bishop alone, we are connected. We can share in what the bishop sees, hears, knows, and feels which is our interconnectedness. From our own vantage point, it's important to see our congregation and neighborhood in the midst of a big, beautiful diocese shimmering with the complexity of the Bay Area: with children and youth, with multi-cultural congregations, with several languages, in feeding and supporting the poor and vulnerable, with seniors, in gardens, with sacraments of welcome like baptism and marriage, in times of grief and sorrow, and all of life in between. We each have a role here.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus rebukes the desires of the disciples for the priority seating at his right or his left. He teaches them about the better ways of leadership saying, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

It is not only Jesus who becomes a servant. It is each one of us who serves: in our own ways; from our own vantage points; within both the specific communities of our "home church" and within the larger community of the diocese. We serve each other in a church that is both local and global. Serving is a visible sign of God's presence in our lives together as Christians. We become the Holy Spirit expressed in the world when we are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ together as The Episcopal Church. Being the one who serves – in a role of church governance, in the sharing of the Episcopate with Bishop Marc, at home, work, or church -- is a practice and discipline of the Christian life. All of us: the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of California, and St. Stephen's: we are not perfect together, but we are connected and interconnected, and we are better when we serve together! *Amen.*