



HOLLYWOOD
United Methodist Church
the **heart** of hollywood

CHANCE TO DO GOOD
Sunday, May 18, 2008

Sermon by Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma, Senior Pastor

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Heather – our cantor – would you stand up please? Last Monday night when Heather was driving home on the 101 around midnight, a car clipped her from behind, and there in the Cahuenga Pass her car spun around, flipped over twice and landed on its roof. And she walked away – bruised up – but she walked away.

When I was talking with Heather, she told me that she is glad to be alive... and that she knows that there is a reason why. That God has a plan and purpose for her life and so she's here to find out what that is. Amen!

Today's Gospel lesson reminds us of the plan and purpose God has for each of us, found in what is called The Great Commission. After the resurrection, Matthew tells us, the 11 disciples go to Galilee. When they see Jesus, they worship him; "but some doubted" (that's a sermon for another day - "they" worship him, but some doubted). On that mountain Jesus issues them their orders, their instructions, -- their mission: "Go disciple everyone, marking them with baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Heather heard those words last Monday night, and we need to hear them today. "And surely I am with you always."

In recording the Great Commission -- Matthew invokes the trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – which is why this is one reason we call the Sunday after Pentecost Trinity Sunday. Today's sermon is not intended to explain the concept of the Trinity.....I'm with Martin Luther who once said

"To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity."

So let me just say this: the problem comes when we see the Trinity as an objective description of God instead of a comprehensive summary of all the things God does. Think of the Trinity as verbs, not as nouns. God has sent God's creating Spirit into all circumstances, all physical locations of the universe and all of time. And we have been

charged to be co-creators with God, to bring forth the reign of God on earth. We have been given a mission – go; use your hands and feet to bring forth justice and peace and wholeness upon the earth.

The important phrases in this passage are “go disciple everyone” and “surely, I am with you always.” These phrases tell us that we have, each and every day, the opportunity to be in mission in various ways; in UM-speak, we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; every day, we have the chance to do good in the name of Jesus Christ.

That phrase, this sermon title, Chance to do Good, comes from one of the two blogs which chronicled the adventures of our second Mississippi Mission team, which returned to Gulfside Assembly in Waveland Mississippi the end of March.

15 people committed a week to help folks rebuild homes and lives in areas still devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The official blog was set up by our communications director Gary Clemmer. I read it to keep up with the various work projects and learn the updates on folks we met last year – Miss Lilly, Miss Mildred, and others.

The unofficial blog was written by team member Victoria Heric. I read it when I wanted to know all the news that wasn't fit to print in the official blog, and that otherwise I would never know. Like, why one team was called the Little Miss Sunshine Team. Or, the story of the Navy SEALs from the Chico UMC. They weren't really SEALs but from what Dave has told me they were no-nonsense, get 'er done contractors. And they'd come into the dining hall late at night and see Victoria, Jay, Mark, Chuck and Johnny at their laptops – shake their heads – and say “we didn't come to blog. We came to work!” Or, other stories best not shared from the pulpit.

Gary has put together a short video of their experiences, which we'll see in just a moment. You can also read about it online – on both blogs. And I hope you will, for the richness of the stories of love and hope will inspire you...such as the dinner and hymn sing with the Amish settlement next door, after which they sang God be With You till we Meet again – which we'll sing at the close of today's service. I hope that reading their experiences will cause you to consider where God is calling you – and us as the church – to be in mission next.

As the news this week will attest, and as John Heaner spoke about so eloquently a few weeks ago: there are no shortage of mission fields, no shortage of pain and suffering in this broken and hurting world. From the broken earth and devastated families in China; to the drowning lives and shameful government restrictions on relief in Myanmar; to the continuing, long-term desperation of thousands of lives along the Gulf Coast... to the thousands of women, men and children who here, in Los Angeles, call the streets their home– we have many opportunities to bring the balm to Gilead, to share the merciful love of God with our brothers and sisters who are in need. To do so

we will need many hands, many hearts, many wallets – and a renewed understanding of what it means to be in mission, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in 2008.

Because being in mission is not only about providing mercy. Being in mission is working for justice – such as Stephanie did when she helped a family in Waveland cut through red tape to get their electricity restored.

Being in mission is knowing that God has entrusted us to bring forth hope and wholeness for all God's people. And then rolling up our sleeves to do the hard work of speaking truth to power.

But lately, and too often lately we as the church have abdicated our responsibilities; we've left it to others to do the work for us. We've said – Injustice towards gay and lesbian persons? Racial intolerance? Prejudice towards immigrants? Towards poor people? No need to worry – we live in the United States. A Christian nation. The government will take care of it, will work it all out -- someday. We don't have to worry about it. And then -- we have seen first hand what our collective inaction has meant to our brothers and sisters.

Our Bishop, Mary Ann, referenced this complacency in her e-column this week:

*For me, what stands out is how much the roles of church and state—in this instance at least—have **switched places** from where we were in the 1960's. In that era, the Protestant church was a socially activist leader in the civil rights movement.pastors and church leaders [were] at the forefront and in the news, their statements and actions analyzed as closely as any presidential candidate today.*

The context of the Bishop's comments were the actions of the California Supreme Court this past week, overturning the ban on same gender marriages in California, which we celebrate abundantly as justice long overdue. Amen.

The court had the chance to do good, and they did. And we rejoice. But what has caused me pain this week: there's something wrong when the government gets it right and the church continues to get it wrong. We the church should be leading and modeling the reality that all persons are created in the image of God and are equally loved by God – we the church should be setting the bar for society, the bar that says that everyone has the right to marry their beloved regardless of gender.

And sadly, we are not. Not yet. But hear the words of Jesus -- I am with you always... so we walk with Jesus as we focus some of our mission emphasis on ourselves, on our beloved United Methodist Church. There is much to be done to change hearts in the next four years, followed by minds and in 2012 the Book of Discipline. How? By continuing as a congregation to model the greatest commandment: love God, love our neighbor – and reach those in Hollywood – gay and straight alike -- who desperately need to feel the love of God. That is our calling, our charge, our mission.

Our mission is clear. Create a church with truly open minds, hearts and doors that offers the love of Jesus Christ. Continue to be God's hands and feet in the broken and hurting places of our city, our country, and our world – bringing hope and rebuilding lives. Be proactive leaders, not complacent followers, in the pursuit of God's justice on earth. Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Know that God has a purpose for each of our lives. And know that God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- is with us always –offering us daily the chance to do good.

Amen.

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