

# Sermon

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Martha Sterne  
21 August, 2016



Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today, Jesus is teaching on the Sabbath in the synagogue maybe about Isaiah saying remove the yoke from among you! That he loved teaching is kinda cool to remember on backpack Sunday! He glances around the group - like any good teacher making eye contact with the students - and he sees this woman who's not making eye contact at all because she is bent over, folded in on herself with her eyes on the ground and pain lines etched around her mouth.

But Jesus sees her - not bent and broken but sees her in her potential, in the fullness of her being and calls to her and says Woman you are set free! And my God, what is her response? Notice she's not critiquing the lesson plan or the lecturer; she just stands up in sheer joy, in elation—delight and praise bubbling up, overflowing out of her - so much so that the people all around her get delighted in the Lord too. It is a Moment!!

Now the priests and the vestry - they freak out and say What is going on? We're Supposed to be reading the torah and the teacher's supposed to be teaching the lesson plan and then we are supposed to mumble our prayers and shuffle along having done our duty. Being cured is not in the bulletin. And nobody's supposed to get set free from bondage today - we just study about things like being freed and healed and being God's beloved. It's not supposed to break loose—Here—Among us!

What do you say? Here? Among us? What do you make of it?

Every month a vestry member—at what is primarily a business meeting—gives a meditation, first thing on the agenda. And I am telling you those lawyers and Pharisees - they give us a little moment. This month Leighton Stradtman described a long ago encounter on a beach of a holy island off the coast of Scotland. A stranger out of nowhere with no introduction of any kind just came up to him and asked him “What do you believe?” And Leighton said only God knows what I said back. And then the stranger said to him, “It's what you make of it, I suppose.”

It is what you make of it. I've been thinking about that in one of the most unexpected seasons of my life when I wash up here amongst all you vibrant people in all of my almost 69 year old frailties and glories. And here is what I have come up with. Every moment of this transition season indeed of our whole lives which turn out to be one transition season after another will be what you and I and the grace of Christ make of it.

I think of a man Jim Ayres who's been a member forever and he was bent sideways with a brain injury and couldn't talk clearly and to tell truth I never tried very hard. And as he lay dying in the nursing home a couple of weeks ago, his social worker, an extraordinary Jewish cherubim named Nancy and you guys who took him communion for fifteen years- well, you just lit me up with memories of encounters with Jim - his sunniness and kindness and wit - all you saw which I had missed - for every relationship is going to be what we make of it.

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I think of a little boy – the child of a very painful divorce- who, surrounded by parish love, became the heart and soul of his youth group. And I'll preach at his priest ordination in Tennessee next month. That's what he made of it.

I think of the bent over couple who told God they'd do anything if he came out the other side of his hideous alcoholism and what they made of that was they became the backbone of hospice volunteers and he became a sponsor of sponsors. That's what they made of it.

I think of a woman who made of a brutal mugging this summer, a holy response. She said no to fear. She claimed her strength. She gave thanks for those who surrounded her with love. The guy got her purse but not her humanity. Not her purse of unstealable treasures. For even every terrible moment will be what you and the grace of Christ make of it.

I think of your senior warden and when we first talked about me coming – I said, now Ken, let me tell you something. All numbers look like snakes to me. And he said numbers don't look like snakes to me so I'll do that part. (Lucky for y'all) But Ken says let me tell something to you. "I don't do touchy feely". And I said, Ken, "I kinda coulda guessed! I'll do that part!!" And we are making something of it.

I think of a stunning letter from George Alexander – the first and to date only African American staff priest at All Saints'; he wrote me of his profound delight that Kim Jackson will soon be among us. And he named you one by one – remembering your hospitality to him and Norma and what many of you and George made of our lay pastoral care - organizational structures that continue to this day thanks be to God.

I think of the priests who worship in this congregation –who've looked up and seen Tim and me and know with fall coming on what a place like this calls forth from staff and priests—and so have offered themselves – four of our affiliated senior priests stepping up to take some on call duties and Sunday stuff too. Stefanie Taylor—busy all week as chaplain at St. Martin's—and others priest friends who will be pitching in for the love of All Saints' and the love of God.

And best of all - all the parishioners – it is Holy - who have said to me hey now remember WE are all saints.

So what will we make of this transition season? After 31 years of priests have said really good good goodbyes, and maybe you are missing them right this second which is also Holy. But I trust –we will not make of this season a time of anxiety or disengagement – I trust here comes a time of friendship, of stepping up for kindness ship, of all in it together ship.

So now I say to our young comrades about to be baptized, it is a real good moment to be baptized. To be here among the saints.

And what will we and the grace and power of Christ make of it? amen