

Boy 2020 has been some year! So many things seem discombobulated. The Dallas Stars are in the Stanley Cup finals yet they playing the games in Canada. The World Series will be played at the Texas Rangers ballpark but the Rangers won't even be in the playoffs. And Reveille was not at the A+M home football game for the first time since she was introduced in 1931. Life has thrown us all a curve ball.

Yet, some things remain the same. I'd even go so far as to say, that the important things have remained the same. Take for instance today. Today we are celebrating the 115th year that church services have been held in this building. That's over a century of tradition - longer than Reveille has been the mascot, certainly longer than the Stars or Rangers have been around. Imagine how different life was in 1905. The total cost for this gorgeous stone church was - can you guess? \$14, 000. In the Centennial History of Christ Episcopal Church book titled *Whosoever Believeth*, written by Raye Virginia Allen and edited by Weldon Cannon, it is said, "These were indeed magnificent and ambitious plans for a small church in a turn-of-the-century Central Texas railroad town."

While the plans sound magnificent and we know the building turned out beautifully, life was not easy. "The next seven years would be desperate ones for Christ Church as parishioners struggled to meet these payments." Then to make matters worse, Rev'd. Sloan resigned, taking the church records with him and leaving the church heavily in debt, and without a Rector. Oh, and there was no bathroom in the church. Looks like life threw the parish a curve ball.

If you haven't read the book *Whosoever Believeth*, it is a fun read, I recommend it. If you read it or any history book you will find places throughout the history of humankind when life has thrown curveballs. World wars, pandemics, economic depression, civil wars, the list goes on. Of course, there are closer to home personal curveballs, loss of job, loss of a loved one, addictions, depression, this list goes on, too.

How did Christ Church find its grounding? What enabled them to survive through those early curveballs and keep playing? How do we stay grounded amidst the discombobulation of our lives? Surely we can find the same source of strength and faith that will enable us to thrive, just as they did.

The answer lies in our Gospel message. It is a story about authority. "From Matthew's post-Easter perspective, it concerns the dispute in Judaism concerning who are the authoritative teachers for the reconstitution of the people of God in the aftermath of the war and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple." Here again we see folks in the midst of difficulties, searching for answers. Authority is a big question for the folks of Jesus time. There are two groups who are exercising power and rule over the lives of people. First, the Romans, and second the religious leaders.

The Romans are easy for the Jewish people to understand. They are not favored by God, and they do not rule either justly, nor in accordance with Divine law. But they do have an army, and they can enforce their will by sheer force. Do what they say, or the army will be called.

The religious leaders are also easy to understand, while they may not have military power to enforce their teachings, they have the weight of tradition, and pride of place. They rule the Temple, the synagogue, and are easily seen by many to be doing what is commonly understood as God's will. Even if what they are doing does not lead to justice, nor to repaired relationship between God's people and God.

John the Baptist, and especially Jesus, don't fit into either category. They clearly have no army to back them up. Nor do they have a long string of other teachers or religious officials who testify to their standing with God. Rather, they bypass entirely the structures of the world, and the structures of institutional religion. They appeal directly to God, and understand that they are responsible before God, and to the people, in all that they say and do.

And what does their appeal to God directly bear by the way of fruit? Restored relationships with God, a flourishing sense of personal justice and holiness! Those who recognize that the God of the Jews is at work now, and especially at work in the person and teachings of Jesus, find themselves able to navigate through the conflicts of the world, find themselves at inner peace, and with a strength that is able to bear up under the weight of history's curveballs.

So what does it mean to understand that Jesus is one who speaks with authority. Not just that he has good credentials, or even that he is truly the spokesperson for Divine teaching. Rather, that he puts forth a kind of North Star, by which all of us can find our true directions in life. Knowing Jesus is what allows us to orient ourselves, to find the way forward. Yes, we will lose sight of this guiding light. But, we can always look up and find it again. Yes, we will be tossed about by the winds of change, the harshness of our circumstances, the opposition of those who find their directions come from another source.

But we turn, again and again, patiently, steadily, and with hope, in moving in a sure direction. We find a sense of what is true, and right, and yes, even Holy, when we walk in the directions given by God.

By whose authority do we live our lives, measure our value, follow in discipleship? By God's. And that is what has allowed Christ Church to weather the storms of life, to hit life's curveballs out of the park. Christ Church is a very loving, Christ-minded, parish that focuses on the authority of God in all that we say and do. Here are some of our recent examples of this focus. Despite the pandemic, this parish continues to be extremely financially generous, raising money, not only for the life of the parish but also for other good works such as Honduras Good Works. The Youth lead a terrific Sunday service from the beginning to the end at the tail end of their mission trip. Last week we had our first Communion service since the pandemic began. Many are doing the hard work of loving their neighbor through the ministry of Racial Justice.

“Knowing Christ and Making Him Known is happening at Christ Church because our focus is on the authority of God. You should be proud of the work that is going on in this parish. I’m proud of the way that you all are staying focused on God in the midst of turbulent times. You love each other and care for each other. It is a joy to be with you.

I want to conclude by sharing a few quotes from the Author’s Preface in *Whosoever Believeth*. Raye Virginia Allen said, “No church is stronger than the worshippers within - those who ‘*walk by faith, not by sight.*’” She continues, “Christ Church stands today in strength and beauty as a monument to their efforts to do God’s will.”

Those words are as true today as they were in 1969. Our service replicates the service that would have been held in 1905, using the same Book of Common Prayer and Hymnal from 1892, to illustrate the continuity, the unity of this parish. We are well poised for another 115 years and beyond. Today is Christ Church Sunday because we follow the authority of God. Amen.