Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 8, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. John M. Pitzer

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen. You may be seated.

So you have heard me preach a few times about my vacation time with my priest buddies.

And it's been a while since I've done that, so you get a story today. So this is the group of priests that we went to the seminary. This is pre-Dominican days, and we've known each other for 40 years.

And I think it's something like 30-something. You know, when you get this old, you don't try to name the year, right? It's just been a long, long time, over 30 years, that we've been vacationing with one another. So it was 10 years ago this past summer, and we were in the low country of South Carolina.

And we decided one day to make a trip to the city of Charleston, South Carolina, and a couple of the guys had never been there before. And so we made our way there, and we always go out to have a nice dinner at some restaurant and try to see something that's interesting, either a, I don't know, a museum or whatever. And someone mentioned that the Citadel was located in Charleston, and all of our fathers served in the military.

And one of the guys in the group of four is kind of a history buff. So we thought, you know, going to the Citadel might be kind of a nice side trip before we go have dinner. So we made our way to the Citadel.

Have you been there before? It's really an interesting campus. All the buildings are white, or kind of off-white. It was interesting.

And one of my friends of the four is kind of a history buff, and he, like, if there's a historical marker somewhere when we're on vacation, he's the kind that will go to the historical marker and read the entire thing while the rest of us just kind of go off. I see a few heads doing this. You know that kind of person.

So he saw, not a historical marker, but he saw a poster on an easel that was announcing a lecture that was taking place at the Citadel that night. The title, we all saw the title. It was Remembering Operation Neptune Spear.

Does that ring a bell with anybody? Well, it didn't with us either. But Daryl, of course, Father Daryl, walks over to see what this little talk's gonna be all about while we are kind of walking through the campus of the Citadel. He makes his way over to us.

He said, I think we need to stay for this talk tonight. And we're like, okay. And he said, well, let's rearrange our dinner plans and come back for this.

It's free of charge. And we're like, okay, Daryl, he's such a history bump. We thought, if Daryl thinks we need to go to this talk, it's gonna last an hour.

We'll go to dinner early. We'll come back. We could still get back to where we are staying on vacation by bedtime.

So anyway, we came back for the talk and it was fascinating. Operation Neptune's Spear was the operation to finally capture and take care of Osama bin Laden. So this guy that was speaking, his name was Robert O'Neill, and he was a Navy SEAL.

And he was on Navy SEAL number six. That was the team that had been planning for a long time to take care of this. So he first started his talk about being, his training as a Navy SEAL, which even before he got to the operation of taking care of Osama bin Laden, that was fascinating.

What Navy SEALs do and the training that takes place and the preparation. I mean, it is not only physically and mentally grueling, it really kind of, in some ways, I don't

wanna say brainwashes, but it kind of changes their mindset because they have to be ready and prepared for anything that comes about. And then when that happens, they are sent to wherever that problem is.

So after he talked about training to be a Navy SEAL, then he talked about Operation Neptune's Spear. And the planning took over a year to plan this, took over a month for them to practice multiple times a day what was gonna happen when they landed in this compound in Pakistan. They knew exactly where the helicopters would land.

They knew how long it would be, how many feet to the foot, how many feet from the helicopter to the door of the compound. Of course, it was a stealth Blackhawk. So they were able to get in under radar, they landed.

They even planned just in case a helicopter crashed. And do you remember what happened? One of the helicopters crashed as they were landing. No one was injured, but then they had to take care of that helicopter and destroy all the information on it before they could leave.

Anyway, Robert O'Neill was, he and another one were the two that, as they made their way through the compound, obviously taking care of people along the way. Robert O'Neill is the man that came face to face with Osama bin Laden. I mean, this talk was absolutely fascinating.

And it was all about his training and preparation and being ready. So when we left the talk that night, we're walking to the car and not a lot was being said. And one of my priest friends, it was, I'm gonna go ahead and throw him under the bus.

It was Father Darrell, who would be the last person you would ever, trust me, he would never be a Navy SEAL. Not because he wasn't smart enough or didn't support the military. He just, he just didn't have it in him.

And he, as we're walking to the car said, you know, I think I could have done that. And the three of us did exactly what you just did. We laughed and we said, are you kidding me? And he goes, I'd like to see him preach a sermon.

I'm like, okay, point taken. We're all trained to do something, right? I mean, I doubt there's anyone in this church and maybe in your younger days. And if you were trained properly, might to be able to be a Navy SEAL.

But there's no one sitting here right now that would be able to stand up and go and be on a mission and take care and do exactly what Robert O'Neill did, right? But I know also we've got a lot of different vocations in this church. You were all trained to do something. If you're a doctor, you go to medical school and you learn about medicine and you learn about whatever your field is, surgery or being an oncologist or a pediatrician.

Or if you're a lawyer, you go to law school and you figure out what area you're gonna be in and you have to get past the law exam. You're prepared. Or if you're a teacher or an accountant or someone who works at home or a social worker, whatever your vocation is, you are trained and prepared to do it.

I mean, and it takes a lot and everybody's vocation is different. So I am now going to pivot just a little bit. We're gonna talk about this gospel because most people say that it is about being prepared and trained.

That's the story we just heard of the 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom to go to the wedding. And five don't have oil and five do have their oil. All right, and it says, you don't know the hour or the day, you must be prepared.

So yes, it is about preparation, but if we went just a little bit below the surface, which I'm not really gonna do today because I realized there's a kickoff in an hour. But here are the things that, some other things that people say about this. Two things that are a little interesting and different.

Why in the world did the bridegroom show up at midnight? What? How come we never talk about that? He, what did he fall asleep? Someone at the eight o'clock said he probably got lost and didn't ask for directions. Very possible, very, very possible. But here's the other thing that we don't talk about.

Why? Why did the five virgins who had oil not share it with the five virgins that didn't? Literally in this same chapter in Matthew, right after this story, is Jesus talking about separating the goats from the sheep. And then he says, when I was hungry, you gave me food. When I was thirsty, you gave me water.

When I was naked, you gave me clothes. When I was in prison, you came to visit me. Don't you think he would have said, when I was out of oil, you gave me some.

But isn't that strange to you? I mean, literally we say, you can't have this. I'm not gonna give you this. And then he turns right around.

But again, that's another homily at another time. So we are gonna talk about, just briefly, about preparedness. How are we prepared? So if I ask you the question, since scripture, since the gospel says, be prepared, you don't know the hour or the day.

If I ask you the question, are you prepared? You might do this. Well, maybe. Yeah, what am I supposed to be prepared for? It is hard to kind of figure out, what are we supposed to be prepared for? We're supposed to be prepared for the kingdom of God, but how do you do that? So that's really what I wanna focus on here for a moment, is how do you and I become prepared to make a difference in the kingdom of God? How do we become, I didn't say this at the eight o'clock.

That's the problem, you don't write things down. But a Dominican brother of mine used to call people who were really, really into their faith, and he called them serious citizens of the kingdom. Isn't that cool? The only time I've ever heard it is from him.

I've never heard it from anyone else. We need to be, if we're gonna be ready and prepared, we need to be serious citizens of the kingdom. So how do we do that? Well, we do the teachings of Jesus.

We follow the teachings of Jesus. You've heard me preach about this before. Maybe you weren't here, and it has been a few years ago when I talked about the non-negotiables of the gospel.

I don't know if you remember that. I don't see any heads going up and down. I see one.

I see two heads going up and down. The non-negotiable, where did I get that line? The non-negotiables. That line came from Catholic seminary, and there were non-negotiable rules.

Can you imagine what those rules were in the Catholic seminary? But that's where I got the line. There are places in our gospel that I think are non-negotiable. Seriously.

People said, Jesus asks a lot of us. No, Jesus doesn't ask a lot of us. He asks us to love, he asks us to forgive, and he asks us to be in service of one another.

Basically, you can argue with me afterwards if you think there's another non-negotiable, but that's really it. Problem is, we don't do any of it very well, and we have to be trained. If we're gonna go into the world, work in the kingdom, help bring about the kingdom, then we need to practice those teachings.

Love, forgiveness, service. So what does that mean? If you're gonna practice it, if I'm gonna practice it, that means you find someone you don't like. I know, you're thinking, that's really hard.

My mother used to say, and you've heard me say this before, Johnny Mac, you do not have to like everybody, but you have to love everyone. Now you can imagine as a small child looking up thinking, what the, does that mean? What does that mean?

You have to, you know what I mean? You have to love everybody, but you don't have to like them. You're not gonna like everybody in your world, but you need to choose someone in your life that you just don't like and challenge yourself to love them.

Challenge yourself, ask for God's grace to do it. And then forgiveness. Probably the hardest thing to do as a Christian, I think, is to forgive someone.

All of us have been wronged by somebody. All of us have had someone do something that is sinful in some ways, right? And we, gosh darn it, we just can't let go of it. And when we can't let go of someone who has wronged us, you know what that means? It means they're controlling you.

People are, no, that person's not controlling me. Yes, they are. If we can't, if we cannot forgive someone in our life, we are allowing them to control us.

So find someone that you've got a grudge against. Find someone that you can't forgive and ask for God's grace for forgiveness. And then lastly, being in service.

I do think that's one of the non-negotiables. I mean, at the Last Supper, Jesus puts an apron around his waist and he washes their feet. And even Peter said, I want nothing to do with that.

Okay, you want nothing to do with that? Then you have nothing to do with my kingdom. Washing someone's feet doesn't mean actually washing their feet, but it means being in service of others. It's all about being prepared.

Just like Robert O'Neill, who was prepared to go into that compound. Just like a doctor who does surgery on you or an eye doctor who examines your eyes or an accountant who does your taxes or a teacher who teaches you or a social worker who helps you during the week because you've got all these problems. That's how we become prepared and ready.

We practice those teachings. So you do that. You manage to do that.

Guess what? You will be ready.

Amen.