

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, October 9, 2022

The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Evensong

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

on

Nehemiah 6:1-16; John 15:12-25

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You are a Blessing!

“I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

Today’s New Testament Lesson, John’s Gospel invites us to take seriously the question of what kind of fruit we want to bear in our lives. We all want our lives not to be in vain but to bear meaningful fruit. However, it is easy to live a daily life without being awake. No one wants to end their life with regrets. We just live today, unaware that one day we will die. That’s why it is not easy to make today more meaningful. I believe that Jesus was always awake and prepared for his own death. Therefore, he must have been able to end his life with the words “It is finished!” without leaving any regrets.

In today’s text, we encounter Jesus who confesses that with all his heart he loves someone who is not related by blood. That love is more than the love that humans can instinctively do.

And he “commands” to ‘love ye that way too.’ It is clearly affirming that we too can love like that, that we are capable of such deep love. These words are often understood as part of Jesus’ final exhortation to his disciples before his crucifixion. After this passage in the Gospel of John, a prayer for the disciples follows, then followed by the arrest of Jesus by treachery, and his suffering and death on the cross. It is a will-like message he left to his disciples right before his death. He is showing us how to live a life where we can face death saying, “It is finished!” like him and how to live a life that bears fruit that will last. It is to love.

We are to love one another as Jesus loves us, who showed the greatest love of giving his life for his friends. A person who has received great love can give great love. If we have learned, experienced, and received God’s great love through worship and liturgy in this beautiful church, that love should be revealed through our life.

There are people who are called priests in the church, but all of you who believe in Jesus are the priests in the world. In the first letter of Peter Ch 2. “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of God who called you out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.” By showing how the life of a follower of Jesus is different through your thoughts, words and deeds in the field of your life, you can live a life that bears fruits to witness Jesus and proclaim the Gospel.

Perhaps a fruit that will never perish can only be produced when it is out into the world. Because this fruit that can only be produced by expanding and widening its scope, beyond me, beyond my family, beyond my church, and beyond the community, race and country which I belong to. This category can be broadened

not only horizontally, but also vertically. Thinking of the generations to come beyond this age we live in now and trying to pass on a better global environment to them is also necessary for the incorruptible fruit we must bear.

This fruit that will last can be produced when we use what we have now, such as time, energy, and resources toward the world beyond ourselves. When we go beyond praying for ourselves and our family, when we pray for our neighbors in need, when we want to spend our time and energy for others, when we are willing to give away a part of what we have, we push our limits little by little and we can be extended. Loving someone means expanding my heart. Swelling and growing are sometimes accompanied by pain. As there is a thing called “growing pain.” It is impossible to love without will, toil, sacrifice and pain.

We heard in today's Old Testament Lesson Nehemiah how many traps, conspiracies, death threats, and slanders must be endured before Nehemiah finished building the wall. However, looking at Nehemiah, who overcame all these blackmails and intimidation and built the wall with courage and dignity, we project our desire to achieve the kingdom of God. When we want to go beyond the selfish life that the world says it is ok and normal, when we want to change small habits for generations to come instead of the comfort and abundance we enjoy today, someone or another voice within ourselves can get in the way of our faith with ridicule and consolation. At that time, with Nehemiah's firm will, straight and strong faith, and wisdom, I hope that in the end we can live the best life for the kingdom of God, that we may bear fruit which should remain, and that the life that people perceive that this work has been accomplished with the help of God. To live a life that bears incorruptible fruit, it is important that we sit quietly before the Lord every day, thanking God for what we have received today, in the time given to us today, in the strength we have used today, in the wealth granted to us today, whether we have used anything for someone else. Through these daily time for reflection, we can live a life of becoming more like Jesus every day.

The church is the community that we spend time together and make an effort together in order to live a life that resembles Jesus little by little every day. The fact that Saint Thomas Church can continue its ministry of sharing the resources with our neighbor in need, supplying spiritual food to thirsty souls and glorifying the Lord through beautiful praise is possible through the gathering of all our hearts who want to be like Jesus little by little every day. Your prayers, your service, your time, and the offering you pledged make this church a place to be able to experience the love of God that transcends time and space.

Archbishop William Temple said, “The Church exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.” Saint Thomas Church is not just chosen to be blessed, but to be a blessing itself. Our very existence is called to be a blessing to the world.