



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Spirit's Tether

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

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The anthem that the Choir just sang--*Draw us in the Spirit's tether*--has particular meaning for me. I have always loved it, the text and rich harmonies are beautifully crafted. It is the piece that I selected for the Celebration of New Ministry when I was installed as your rector. The anthem was written by Harold Friedell who served as Music Director of several large New York parishes in the mid-50s using text was written by an English theologian some 75 years earlier. Friedell wrote the piece originally for Pentecost Sunday but I find that it fits just as well the week before as we prepare to move into a new time.

This Sunday we come to the end of the Easter Season, Ascension Day was Thursday but the coming of the Holy Spirit isn't for another week. So the disciples and we are in this uncertain, what to do now place. The anthem serves as a mighty prayer that we will be drawn into the Spirit's tether. Tether is not a word that we use very often, unless you like to play tetherball or you secure your livestock in a field by tethering them to something. A tether is something that fastens and restrains you while giving you freedom to move. As Jesus disappeared from sight and the disciples stood gaping, they must have felt as if they were suddenly untethered. The nearby angels said, "Don't just stand there, do something!" In their uncertainty, the disciples did exactly the right thing. They held onto each other. I believe that in our faith we are tethered to each other and in the web so created, we find our strength and our purpose as we move through our days.

This rather dire sounding reading from the 1st Letter of Peter gives us a glimpse of the work that faced the earliest Christians and unfortunately still faces us today. The author of this epistle uses some colorful language..."Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." While I don't consider "the devil" to be some nasty individual, there are plenty of powers, principalities, and systems that are certainly devilish and we are called to recognize, name and resist them. Every week there are a number of religious blogs that I read - I do it so you don't have to - and I found something helpful about this week's lessons...

The reading from 1 Peter invites us to a robust spirituality. William James once spoke of the moral equivalent of war, and the author of 1 Peter would agree. There are threats abounding in our world and they can overwhelm us, if we lose our focus and succumb to apathy, fear, and temptation. Faithful mindfulness keeps us alert to God's presence, the dangers at hand, and the power available to us. From our sheltered comfort zones, we often act as if life is safe and secure. But, deep down, we know differently. We have a fight on our hands. While we may not

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choose sides or define others as enemies, the future of our planet is at stake, the economic well-being of millions is on the line; we face those who hate, exploit, and destroy in the name of God and personal prosperity. We face those who limit God's love to a select view or view God's sovereignty as license to kidnap young girls, line their pockets with gold, and destroy the environment for short term financial gain. We face our own complicity and fearfulness. We may have to sacrifice so that others will live, and in sacrifice, we share in Christ's own willingness to share our burdens so that we might find wholeness... (Bruce Epperly)

We can add to this the all too familiar shootings that snuff out numerous lives in an instant. The animosity directed toward grieving parents calling for some response to this insanity is incomprehensible to me. For someone to say "my right to my guns is more important than your child's life" tells me that our society has become so sick that nothing short of a heart transplant will fix it.

The concentration of wealth in a very small number of pockets is certainly a devouring lion. Economic inequality has its jaws on the throats of working people everywhere. The largest, wealthiest corporations are doing everything in their power to keep from paying a true living wage. And all because it would change the bottom line, not spell disaster but simply reduce the amount of profit. "Our bonuses are more important than your need to eat regularly."

I wake up some days and can hardly recognize my fellow humans. It is, quite simply, overwhelming. No matter how good our hearts are and how large our Outreach budget is, we can't fix this. But that doesn't mean that we are helpless. Our great strength is found in the tether and if we strengthen the ties that bind us, and do all that we are called to do while finding joy in our connection we will become stronger ourselves and others will find themselves drawn in the spirit's tether. As the Body of Christ our existence will be a threat to the devouring lion.

I want to leave you with some wisdom from Margaret Wheatley's book *So Far From Home; lost and found in our brave new world*. She is one of the great visionary thinkers of our time, trying to help us create better organizations and ultimately a better world. She is a woman of deep and interesting faith.

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