

**She Will Remind You**  
**Sunday, July 11, 2021, 11:15 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Susan Russell**

*O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

This prayer that began our worship this morning is arguably one of my favorite prayers in the whole prayer book. Help us figure out what to *do* then give us grace to do it -- a perfect reminder that the prayers we pray are meant to both inspire and inform the work we do in the world.

It is a prayer and a challenge we would be well served praying and hearing 365 days a year – not just this Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – “Proper 10” in the lectionary cycle – a day I think of as “'Help us understand what to do' Sunday.”

Every time I read it, hear it or pray it I remember the words of my favorite theologian: African American Episcopalian and biblical scholar Dr. Verna Dozier who famously said, “Don’t tell me what you believe – tell me what difference it makes that you believe.”

It is a prayer that reminds us that the work of the church ... the reason we gather in the first place ... is not for our own sake, but to live out the mission of the Gospel in the world.

That was true when we had to find new and creative ways to gather during these last challenging months when online was our only option and Zoom became simultaneously our new best friend and the bane of our existence.

It is true now as we continue to take incremental steps back to in person worship and gathering -- with another longed for step today with the return of congregational singing ... and what an incredible delight it is to once again hear a joyful noise coming from the All Saints pews!

And it will be true in the days and weeks and months ahead as we journey forward: not "back to normal" but -- in the words of our bishop John Taylor -- back to a future we cannot yet imagine ... as we live out the mission of the Church in our beautiful and broken world.

Some of you will know -- and some of you may have yet to discover -- that in back of the prayer book is something called "An Outline of the Faith" -- also known as the "Catechism." Here's how it describes that work we are called to do:

- Q.     What is the mission of the Church?
- A.     The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other.
- Q.     How does the Church pursue its mission?

- A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.
- Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?
- A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

All its members. Not just the clergy or the vestry or the altar guild or the "task force on what's happening now."

**All** its members living out their faith in the world ... asking themselves and each other the question in the prayer that began our worship today: help us understand what to do ... and then help us do it.

Because over and over and over again we are reminded that in order to do that work ... any of that work ... we need help.

The words of the ancient Psalm appointed for today reminds us across the generations that we belong to a lineage of faith that has called out to God in the midst of the struggle and asked for help -- for strength -- and prayed that remembering the stories of God's deliverance in the past would empower us to continue to move forward into God's future.

And the words of Jesus in the Gospel from John promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit -- telling the disciples and us:

**"She will teach you all things and,  
She will remind you all of all that I have said to you."**

Remind us to love our neighbors as ourselves.  
Remind us to work for justice, love and compassion.  
Remind us to be the change we want to see in the world.  
Remind us that nothing -- not even death --  
can separate us from the indestructible power of God's inexhaustible love.

Throughout the ages that promise  
has inspired and sustained generations of the faithful  
on whose shoulders we stand on this  
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost here at All Saints Church in Pasadena.

And -- if we let them -- they will inspire and sustain us in the work we have ahead of us.

For Lord knows, there is plenty on the to-do list  
as we face challenges in our polarized and divided nation  
moving out of a global pandemic back to a future we have yet to imagine  
in a world simultaneously threatened by the climate crisis attacking our planet and the rise of  
authoritarian oligarchies attacking our democracy.

It can seem like so much to do  
that we don't even know where to start.  
And so we don't. Start. We just stew.  
And if our scriptural record tells us anything,  
it tells us that we're not the first generation of folks to face that challenge.

Just for starters, listen to the lament of the ancient psalmist:

*In the day of my trouble the Holy One I seek,  
my hand at night is stretched out without rest;  
my soul refuses to be comforted.  
I contemplate God, and I groan.*

And remember that the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking  
in today's reading from the Gospel of John  
were living under Roman occupation  
following a Radical Rabbi from Nazareth  
who was in trouble with their own temple authorities and civic leaders  
and was now talking about leaving them to go to the Creator  
but "not to worry -- the Holy Spirit will be coming."

Not a whole lot to hang onto there.

Nevertheless, they persisted. And so do we ...  
even when we're not exactly sure what to do next.

I love how friend Brian McLaren tells that story:

*In the millennia since Christ walked with us on this Earth,  
we've often tried to box up the "wind" [of the Spirit] in manageable doctrines.  
We've exchanged the fire of the Spirit for the ice of religious pride.  
We've turned the wine back into water,  
and then let the water go stagnant and lukewarm.*

*We've traded the gentle dove of peace  
for the predatory hawk or eagle of empire.  
When we have done so, we have ended up  
with just another religious system, as problematic as any other:  
too often petty, argumentative, judgmental,  
cold, hostile, bureaucratic, self-seeking, an enemy of aliveness.  
In a world full of big challenges,  
in a time like ours, we can't settle for a heavy and fixed religion.  
We can't try to contain the Spirit in a box.*

In a box or a building or a book ...  
or even in our best laid strategic plans:  
The Spirit will blow where she will ...

Will call us back to the future we can't yet imagine  
Will be with us always  
As close to us as the very beat of our hearts.

Hear the words of Steven Charleston --  
the former Bishop of Alaska and an Elder in the Choctaw Nation --  
calling us to listen to respond:

*Rise up to feel the drum within you,  
the ancient drum that has sounded the heartbeat of a thousand nations,  
the old sound, the sacred sound of our earliest ancestors,  
still beating, still reverberating through the centuries,  
connecting us to one another,  
accompanying our first prayers,  
an echo of the story we tell in hushed voices,  
our saga of truth revealed,  
our collective memory of wonder.  
Listen to the drum within you.*

*Feel the deep percussion of your own heart,  
the breathing of your soul,  
redolent with the power of creation,  
the sacred energy of the Spirit,  
the animation of your holy life,  
the call to rise and walk with authority into the unseen lands ahead.  
The drum calls you. The drum knows your name.  
Listen: it reminds you that you are not defined by time,  
but by the love you share.*

No ... we're not sure exactly where we're going next.  
But we know we are here together ... in this moment.  
We know that grace abounds.  
We know that those who have gone before us  
continue to stand with us and inspire us through their words and witness.  
And we know that we are defined the love we share  
as what Archbishop Oscar Romero called "prophets of future not our own."

As we journey into that future not our own,  
may we trust that the God who inspired the psalmist,  
who sent the Holy Spirit to guide us  
and who gave us the gift of prophets on whose shoulders we stand  
will be with us in our work in the world ...  
as we live out the Gospel each and every day ...  
asking God to help us understand what it is we are called to do,

and then helping us do it.  
Amen.