

**The Cornerstone  
Cornerstone Sunday, October 8, 2023, 10:00 a.m.  
All Saints Church, Pasadena  
The Rev. Mike Kinman**

When I say "God is good" ... you say

"All the time"

That's right.

And when I say "All the time" ... you say

"God is good."

Let's try that again:

God is good (all the time)  
All the time (God is good)

One more time

God is good (all the time)  
All the time (God is good)

Again

God is good (all the time)  
All the time (God is good)

That call and response has been around for a while. I know it from more evangelical circles, and it's certainly not restricted to them.

And it feels good to say, doesn't it?

It feels joyful and hopeful. Kind of like when Jimmy Buffett says there's Cheeseburgers in Paradise or when Vin says It's Time for Dodger Baseball (well, except for last night).

God is good ... all the time.  
All the time ... God is good.

That's right.  
And it is right.

And that why for nearly 100 years we have been gathering on this spot. Because we live in hope, we live in trust ... that God is good ... all the time.

Now here's the thing about that statement. There is significant evidence to the contrary ... even in the Bible.

Just ask Lot's wife.

Or the Egyptian army at the Red Sea.

Or how about the 42 children who made fun of Elisha's bald head (2 Kings 2:3-25 ... look that one up if you want a scripture passage that will make you call DCFS on our creator..)

The list of divine smite-ees is pretty long ... and for them God is a lot more like the protagonist in a Stephen King novel than a paragon of goodness and mercy.

And what about us. Close your eyes.

Now, if you have had a personal experience in your life or if you have read watched or heard something that has made you question the goodness of God or that the arc of the moral universe is really bending toward justice, raise your hand.

Now .. I invite you to keep those hands up and look around.

Yeah. Nearly all of us.

And you know what that means.

It means when we say "God is good" (All the time).

"All the time" (God is good).

We are not stating the obvious. We are making not just a bold statement but a revolutionary one.

First of all, that there is a God, however we might define them.

And second that despite the stuff in our lives that is most certainly not good ... that the goodness of God is eternal and unshakeable.

God is good (all the time)

All the time (God is good)

You would probably get an argument about that right now, and you might have gotten an argument about that in 1923.

Cholera sweeping through India.  
 Nativism rising in the U.S. with the Klan, the Red Scare and Jim Crow.  
 Organized crime.  
 Prohibition.  
 The Yankees winning their first World Series.  
 I mean things were pretty bad.

And yet through it all there was hope.  
 Through it all, there has always been hope.

Sometimes we have tried to draw lines of who's in and who's out and act like hope is just for some of us not all of us.

And ... through it all there has always been hope ... for everyone..

Because

God is good (all the time)  
 And All the Time (God is good)

And that's why 100 years ago, the cornerstone of this church was laid. To bear witness to this eternal truth, this eternal hope that continues to find ways to make life worth living.

I love the location of this church.  
 Right across from City Hall.

The church's proper place is before the throne ... proclaiming the hope of the goodness of God and the power of love and holding whoever is on the throne accountable to working in love for the goodness of all.

And yet, when the cornerstone of this building was laid 100 years ago this weekend, City Hall was just an idea ... a bond issue civic leaders were hoping would pass so that by the end of the decade City Hall, Central Library and the Convention Center would join All Saints Church as the heart of new Pasadena.

And through it all, this building has been a beacon of hope. A reminder that as bad as things might get ... and they have gotten pretty bad at some times ... that hope never dies because love never dies and that

God is Good (all the time)  
 And All the Time (God is good)

That's the cornerstone. The belief on which the entire church is structured.

That's what churches, temples, synagogues, ashrams are, at their best. Reminders of the goodness of what is and that all that isn't good ... well, it doesn't have to be this way.

Now like all truths, we fail to live into them sometimes. And that's hard to acknowledge. Unless you're in the crosshairs of that failure and then it's unavoidable.

Sometimes it's hard to look in the mirror, and sometimes we haven't even learned to know what it is we are looking at when we do.

When that cornerstone was laid a hundred years ago, those who laid it perhaps did not know or even more to the point didn't know that they should care that the land on which that stone was laid had seen a thriving beautiful nation of Tongva people pushed off it.

Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery were still alive and well – I mean, let's be honest, they're still alive and well ... and they were in large part how Pasadena came to be. That was the air the founders of this church breathed in so of course it was the air they breathed out.

We don't get it all right all of the time.

Sometimes we don't even get some of it right some of the time.

But you see, that's the wonderful thing about God being good when? ... (all the time) ... is that God's goodness endures. And God's spirit inspires. And we learn. And we grow. And we try to trust that as Bryan Stephenson says, "we are all more than the worst thing we've ever done." ...which frees us to become the best that we ever can, frees us to become fully who God has made us.

God's eternal goodness has never meant that we always get it right ... only that we keep hoping, keep trusting, keep learning and keep trying.

And ... where we now have the perspective to recognize that we have wounded each other, to listen deeply to those whom we have wounded and let them lead the wounding and their descendants in repairing those breaches and truly becoming beloved community .... where God's eternal goodness is about and for absolutely everyone.

And that is what has happened in this place for nearly a century.

And that is what we are doing with our Tongva siblings right now. Listening deeply, repairing the breach and growing together in love.

God is good (all the time)  
All the time (God is good)

That's what built this church.

But we weren't done yet.

Now, the center of this building has been and always will be this table.

Even when it used to be up against that wall and the priest presided at Eucharist in verbiage that strained the definition of the vernacular ... much like that sentence might ... that table was the center of our life together. People were drawn in toward it and people were sent from it ... like a beating heart at the center of Pasadena's civic life.

And the people of All Saints Church knew the Jesus they were walking with was revolutionary. And they knew that what made Jesus revolutionary is that he set a table and said "y'all come." And not just "y'all come" but as they say in the Midwest and south, "all y'all." ... absolutely everyone.

In a church where that is still a violation of Episcopal canon law, that was and is an extraordinary statement.

In a world where divisions among people for any number of reasons and isms was as strong as ever, that was and is an extraordinary statement. That open table is, just like Jesus, the incarnation of Radical Inclusion, Courageous Justice, Joyful Spirituality and Ethical Stewardship.

Now, it was only in the last half century that George Regas put that sentiment into words when he said ... say it along with me if you know it

"Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith you are welcome to come to Christ's table and receive the gifts of bread and wine made holy."

OK ... the reason we diverged there at the end is that this phrase is literally written on the buildings of this campus with two different endings, but you get the picture.

Whoever you are and whatever your faith this can be your home.

And we meant it. Both before and after George said it.

And it has changed people's lives.

And ... once again, like all truths, we fail to live into them sometimes. Because you might be sitting there and thinking ... hey, that's not the whole story because for me and my ancestors, maybe we didn't feel that welcome so much.

And we don't heal unless you tell the whole story, so we have to tell not just the stories of triumph but of where we fell and are falling short.

For example, when black people came to be a part of God's goodness at All Saints Church, we said, "Well, God is still good all the time over there on North Fair Oaks. So why don't we buy you your own table, and you can welcome everyone you want to your table, and we will welcome everyone we want to ours."

There's nobody around today to tell us, but in my sanctified imagination I'll say there were probably a few there who thought turning away people didn't really jive with the goodness of God and Christ's open table, but clearly their voices didn't carry the day.

And again, as it still is today, white supremacy is the air we breathe and every one of us breathes in and breathes out without noticing until someone makes us aware of it ... unless our very lives every day make us all too aware of it.

And we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater ... and we don't whitewash our history either. We celebrate the good, and we do the work of repentance and healing with the bad. Not bad people but bad actions, behaviors, policies.

Because proclaiming the goodness of God in a world that doesn't seem too good is challenging. It's hard work. And we are going to get it wrong a lot. But we keep trying.

Inviting absolutely everyone to the table and understanding the sharing of power that invites us to in a world that doesn't act like sharing power is even possible ... is challenging. It's hard work. And we are going to get it wrong a lot. But we keep trying.

And that is what we are just beginning with St. Barnabas Church. And our first step is to listen deeply to their story so that eventually together we can write a new story.

"Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith, you are welcome to come to Christ's table."

That's a cornerstone. And by the way, a church can have more than one cornerstone. Just do the scavenger hunt after the service and find out.

"Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith you are welcome to come to Christ's table."

That's what sustained this Church.  
But we weren't done yet.

Because If God is good (all the time) and all the time (God is good).

And if all of God's children are invited to Christ's table to feast and become the Body of Christ.

Then the next logical theological step is to say

“God dwells in you”

(“and also in you!”)

Whew ... thank you. I was wondering if you were going to leave me hanging there for a second.

Leave me wondering whether God dwells in me, too.

And of course, that’s been a challenge, too.

Because even though we have said “God dwells in you” (And also in you), terms and conditions have most certainly applied.

For example, for most of the history of this building if you were a woman you couldn’t preside at Eucharist or serve on the vestry.

For most of the history of this building, if you fell in love with someone of the same sex that you are, you couldn’t get married in this place ... and for most of the history of this building if you got divorced it was a scandal but if you beat your spouse... not so much.

For most of the history of this building if you weren’t a native English speaker and wanted to pray and hear the Gospel in the language of your heart you were just plum outta luck!

And ... every time we gathered, we kept insisting “God dwells in you” ... And the Holy Spirit, she is tricky and wonderful ... and she took those words and set them to work in our hearts. And over time, each one of those things changed. Because we began to see each other not only as fully human -- I mean that is challenging enough -- but as fully divine ... as living incarnations of the God who is good all time and dwellers at the table at which there are no barriers to gather.

We began to hear each others’ cries and let our compassion be bigger than our defensiveness and our fear.

And we are still in the process ... we will always be in the process... of celebrating what we have achieved, lamenting what we have lost and healing the wounds we and our ancestors have caused and we are still causing.

When we talk about telling the whole story ... not just about our iconography, the land we occupy and our relationship with St. Barnabas Church but about our entire history as a church it’s not a process of self-shaming but of healing and liberation.

Because every story told that leads to a wound healed makes us so much more whole, so much more alive.

We tell the story and heal the wounds so we can follow the lead of the trans people among us and having the courage to become who inside we trust that we truly are.

We tell the story and heal the wounds so we can follow the lead of so many of the immigrants among us and learning to converse in different languages and allowing space for everyone's culture and identity to be celebrated.

We tell the story and heal the wounds so we can follow the lead of those among us who sleep on these church grounds every night in having the courage to stand up for ourselves and each other when the world refuses to treat us with the dignity every image of God demands.

We tell the story and heal the wounds so we can follow the lead of all of us ... old, young and in between ... in our struggle to believe we are loved just as we are and yet with God's help, we can love ourselves and each other better than we do now.

Years ago, I was at Canterbury Cathedral in England, arguably the heart of the Anglican Communion. And the tour guide took us to an open space where a single candle burns in memory of Thomas a Becket. And then she had us look at our feet and we noticed that beneath them was a long line of depression in the stone floor that ran the length of the space.

That, she said, is the impression of centuries of pilgrims passing by this spot on their knees. The faith of generations literally reshaped the stone of the cathedral.

What makes something holy is not that it has beautiful art or that a bishop has consecrated it.

What makes a place holy is not that it bears a sacred name or a denominational seal.

What makes a place holy is centuries of people sanctifying it with their struggle. Literally coming on their knees wanting to be loved and love better.

And so while we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of this building today and while we will spend this year of commemoration, reflection and celebration telling wonderful and sometimes painful stories ... what has made this space sacred and what continues to make this space sacred has nothing to do with the bricks and mortar and glass.

It's us. And a hundred years of people like us – sanctifying this space with our struggle. Sanctifying the space with our truths ... even and especially when they might not agree.

Sanctifying this space with our laughter and our tears. With our triumphs and our failures. With our living and with our dying.

Every prayer every muttered, every song every sung, every word ever spoken, every tear ever shed in this space is still here. They are a century's long echo of amazing people on whose shoulders we stand who dared to say.



God is good (all the time)  
All the time (God is good)

Who dared to say “whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith you are welcome here.”

Who dared to say “God dwells in you” (And also in you) ... and even more dared to try to believe it not just about each other but about themselves.

We don't have to create anything new to embrace the future God dreams for us. We just need to stay together and keep struggling, singing, dancing, laughing, crying, giving and resist the temptation to let a polarized world convince us there are others who need to be defeated instead of wounds that need to be healed.

How will we be faithful in the next 100 years? The same way we were faithful in the last 100. By continually pushing the boundaries of the Radical in our Inclusion, the courageous in our justice, the joyful in our spirituality and the ethical in our stewardship.

By hearing God speak to us in new ways through ancient words ... because God is faithful to us even when we struggle to be faithful to God.

Because God's love is our true cornerstone

And God is good (all the time)  
And all the time (God is good).

Amen.