

Of Treasure Hunts and Vin Scully and 20 Years of Claiming the Blessing
Sunday, August 7, 2022, 10:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Susan Russell

I bid your indulgence this morning by beginning with this favorite prayer of mine.

- *God of the stand-up triple, the backdoor slider, the stolen base and the 3-6-3, we thank you for the ordered enchantments of the game of baseball.*
- *For the snap of a split-finger fastball in a catcher's mitt and the arc of a white ball against a blue sky, we praise you.*
- *For the green of the grass and the throat of the crowd, we glorify you.*
- *For the grace and grit, the speed and strength, the skill and savvy of those who take the field, we give you thanks.*
- *Shower your blessings like so many free agent contracts upon those who play, those who coach and those who cheer.*
- *Exalt with us when we knock in the winning run, comfort us when we miff an easy grounder, befriend us when the hour is late and the game on the radio is our only company.*
- *Creator God, teach us to play fair; to cheer excellence whomever exhibits it, and to root for teams worthy of our affections. And keep us ever mindful that no matter what the umpire says, in your love, we are always safe at home. Amen.*

I grew up on baseball. My dad was a lifelong Dodger fan who believed it was an outward and visible sign of the inherent goodness of the universe that the Dodgers moved to L.A. after he came west from New York looking for work during the Great Depression. The voice of Vin Scully was literally the soundtrack of every summer of my life until he retired – after 67 years of broadcasting the ups and downs of the Boys in Blue. And I know from the outpouring of responses to his death this week at the age of 94 that my story is the story of countless others for whom Vinnie was not just a voice on the radio but a friend and a companion on the journey – not just through the baseball season but through life.

In reflecting on his life this week I have found myself bumping up against all kinds of bits and pieces of my own life. Fond memories of listening with my daddy on the patio in Eagle Rock on hot summer nights to games on the radio. Of sitting in the stadium where the sound of Scully's voice hovered over the crowd from the hundreds of transistor radios tuned in to his play-by-play.

Of the night Sandy Koufax pitched his perfect game against the Cubs in 1965 ... yes I was there! I was nine. Do the math.

And all of those memories transcend the context of a particular game or team or stadium or sportscaster. Rather they are about remembering and celebrating the relationship at the center of those memories. Not only with my dad but with others I've shared the joy of victory and the agony of defeat as a lifelong Dodger fan.

Yes, baseball is great. And I give thanks for it. But even more so, I give thanks for the memories of the relationships that have sustained and shaped me – relationships which moments like this week’s collective grief over the passing of Vin Scully has surfaced and given me the chance to ponder in my heart.

And as I mulled the lessons appointed for this Sunday, these words from Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel According to Luke are the ones that jumped out at me:

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Jesus tells his followers to get rid of their stuff – empty out the Public Storage locker of all the gizmos and whatnots they weren’t using but couldn’t bear to part with – and store up a different kind of treasure: the kind thieves cannot steal, and moths cannot destroy.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

What I wonder this morning is if the history of the church -- ostensibly founded to follow Jesus and live out his teachings in the world -- has not spent the last 2000+ years on a kind of **treasure hunt** trying to figure out what that treasure is and therefore where its heart is.

And whether it’s more breaking secular news of the rise of Christian Nationalism in our nation -- or more breaking church news about bishops behaving badly by turning the lives and vocations of God’s beloved LGBTQ people into bargaining chips in the game of global Anglican politics -- we don’t have to look far to see how far we are from bringing that kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven we pray for every time we gather.

And – listening to the words from the prophet Isaiah this morning – it seems we have plenty of company from our spiritual ancestors who were evidently flunking the treasure hunt, too.

“These interminable sacrifices of yours: what are they to me?” ...

Do not bring any more of your useless offerings to me —

their incense fills me with loathing.

New moons, Sabbaths, assemblies —

I cannot endure another festival of injustice!

“I cannot endure another festival of injustice.”

Maybe it’s just me, but the fact that this particular lesson is appointed for this particular Sunday -- which just happens to be the final day of the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops -- struck me as a rather remarkable coincidence: and that is not to say some good things did not happen across the pond ... I’ll get to those in a minute.

But to get back to Isaiah – here is what the prophet proclaimed trying to get them back on the

hunt for the treasure God would have them both find and share:

*Cease to do evil and learn to do good!
Search for justice and help the oppressed!
Protect those who are orphaned
and plead the case of those who are widowed!
Come now! Look at the choices before you!*

The choice before them was between focusing on their rituals and gatherings and incense and sacrifices or focusing on their relationships with those in need: leveraging their power to protect the orphaned and plead the case of the widowed.

This is the same treasure hunt Jesus called his followers throughout his entire ministry. From the first sermon he preached in Nazareth – which riled up the hometown crowd so much he almost got tossed off a cliff – to his final words in Jerusalem which led to his death and – ultimately to his resurrection.

*Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself.
On these two hang all the law and the prophets.*

All the law and the prophets.
All the rituals and sacrifices and assemblies and festivals.
All the liturgies and cantatas and prayer book revisions and fights over inclusive language.
All the General Conventions and Lambeth Conferences.

It all hangs on love – love lived out in relationship with God and in relationship with our neighbor.

All our neighbors. Not just the ones who live in our zip code or drive in our carpool or put the same yard signs out on their lawns.

All the law and the prophets.
All your neighbors.

Now this may feel like a non sequitur, but work with me.
I'll bring it back. I promise.

Twenty years on last Monday, August 1st I arrived here at All Saints Church with a milk crate full of file folders to set up camp in the southeast cubicle in the "temporary trailer."

My title was Executive Director of Claiming the Blessing and my job description work for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in Body of Christ in general and in the Episcopal Church in specific -- by healing the rift between sexuality and spirituality.

I know. Right?? Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

Well, clearly that work is not done yet. There are miles to go before we rest and there have been countless two steps forward and one step back in the last 20 years.

But we are inarguably in a different place on the journey than we were when the sidewalks outside 132 Euclid were frequently lined with megaphone carrying protestors, when the blessing of a same-sex union or the ordination of a gay or lesbian priest was front page news, and when the Episcopal Church was under threat of being voted off the Anglican Island for consecrating the first openly gay bishop. (Emphasis on the “openly.”)

Yes, we organized and strategized, legislated and lobbied, fundraised and focus grouped, prayed, studied, and then prayed some more.

And overarching all that were these values we held to throughout the struggle:

That we never threatened to leave if we didn't get our own way; we only threatened to stay and continue to speak the truth that until there are no strangers left at the gate none of us are truly welcome.

That we called the church to focus on who will come if we include all – not who might leave if we refuse to exclude some.

And that the love that unites us in relationship as members of the Body of Christ is greater than the differences that challenge us.

Which brings me back to the **treasure hunt** metaphor and my wondering this morning if the treasure at the heart of our Anglican tradition might just be its ability to value relationship over agreement.

As Anglicans our DNA was, after all, forged out of the English Reformation by spiritual ancestors who found a way where there was no way to become a particular people of faith who were willing to live with the tension of being both catholic and protestant – rather than keep burning each other at the stake over who was right about which dogma or which doctrine.

We continue on that seeking the treasure of relationship over agreement
at every level of the Episcopal Church –
from our bishops gathered at Lambeth
to our recently completed General Convention
to our work here in the Diocese of Los Angeles
to our mission and ministry here at All Saint Church in Pasadena.

Nobody ever said it would be easy – but if we continue to set our hearts on relationship ... with God and with each other ... then we will indeed have the treasure that thieves cannot steal nor moths destroy.

A publication called The Anglican Digest
used to have a feature entitled "Makes the Heart Glad."

Here's what made my heart this week: this quote from the Archbishop of York
addressing the Lambeth Conference of Bishops:

"Now we are no longer threatening to leave, we are threatening to stay. This week is a new beginning for the Anglican Communion, a new beginning of discipleship."

It makes my heart glad because hope springs eternal
and I believe it may truly be a watershed moment.
I am daring to hope that we have arrived at the point
where we can live into the DNA of our Anglican Comprehensiveness
and move beyond the decades of pitched battles
over the full inclusion of LGBTQ people
in the work and witness of the church
as we focus on our common call to discipleship:
to telling the Good News of God's inclusive love in this beautiful and broken world.

I'm not naïve enough to think that we have "arrived at destination" ...
but I am old enough to know that we are a **way** piece further down the road
than we were when we set up shop in the "temporary trailer"
20 years ago this week – and that is something to rejoice and be glad in.

And so we continue on the treasure hunt –

for that is where our heart is.

And as we journey together in God's future,
our job post-Lambeth will be to continue to do what we've been doing.

To insist that nothing less than full inclusion
is good enough for Jesus or for us.
To leverage our privilege to stand up and speak out
for those LGBTQ siblings whose voices
have been silenced by oppression and marginalization.

To continue to build relationship across difference
and trust that the Holy Spirit not only can but will
use those relationships to change not only hearts and minds
but theologies and policies
until there are no strangers left at the gate;
until there is no treasure left to hunt;
until no matter what any umpire says,
every single member of our Big Fat Human Family
will know that in God's love,
they are always safe at home. Amen.