

Sermon: Youth Sunday (February 21)

Theme: Ambassadors for Christ

UWI Chapel Anglican Community

First Lesson: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Second Lesson: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Gospel: Luke 13:31-35

I grew up in what I call, the middle of a religious tug. My mother used to attend a revival church. Looking back it's a wonder I was not confused or maybe I was. Here it is: I grew up with my mother a revivalist. But we lived with her mother, who was an ardent Anglican. My grandmother, perhaps because of stereotypes, ensured I hardly set foot in my mommy's church. So every Sunday, I went to St Gregory's. But as a child, I was attracted to the sounds and styles of worship at my mother's church. It was easier that the church was almost right next door. So sometimes, mommy would steal me away and take me to conventions and special events at her Church and I was only too willing.

Typically as soon as I get back home or have a chance, I would try and re-do almost everything I witnessed. Among my cousins, I was Bishop Johnson. We would “get inna spirit,” and jump. Sprinkle water...mark out a space similar to how we saw it at the church. It was fun. As I grew, I became “more settled” and to my grandmother's pleasure and certain relief, I chose to cling to the Anglican faith.

In a large way, the Apostle Paul would characterise what I was doing as an imitation. And he would be right. I was imitating the practices of the revival church perhaps innocently, for fun. In his message to the Church in Philippi as read in today's second lesson, Paul commended imitation to the Christian community as one means to reflect Christ and Christ's lived examples in their lives. He called on them to use his example, in so far as he was living in conformity with Christ. They were new converts and he knew they were to become ambassadors for Christ for all the potential converts. But he also knew they

need a standard. Today, we who are gathered here this morning, are all ambassadors, ambassadors in constant training to become imitators of Christ.

Paul did not just commend to the Christian community the need to look at his example as ambassadors who imitate Christ. He also had a warning in the Phillipians reading for today for the people whom he call “enemies of the cross”. These are the people who imitate Christ, not because they intend to reflect Christ on earth but simply as a means to an end...an end that has nothing to do with the ultimate glorification of the Lord and Saviour. Paul, with tears in his eyes, told the people in Philippi of those enemies, whose end will be destruction because of their failure to imitate Christ as ambassadors.

Except for the difference in time, we, like, the people of Philippi do not have Jesus walking with us and this is the very reason we need to be his ambassadors. We depend on His word and the example being set by people such as pastors and other leaders. We depend on standards and benchmarks. And we use what we see. That is why we use expressions such as ‘you don’t have the moral authority,’ or you can’t speak to me and see what you’re doing.’ Because we judge actions with dictates. We can’t say one thing and do the other. Although, clever people have come up with ‘do as I say, not as I do’. Many of us who may be enemies of the cross are not necessarily seen. Many of our actions are out of the public’s glare but always, we should be reminded, in the constant sight of Christ who has called us to be his ambassadors.

The message by Paul for Christians to be ambassadors of Christ is also starkly given in the context of his writings. It would not be lost on the Phillipians that Paul was writing from prison and the reason for his being locked up. Through this, Paul is also communicating the challenges that come with living by his example in so far as he is following Christ example and being an ambassador for Christ. Critically, he issues a similar challenge to different early Christian communities. It’s a clear articulation in I & II Thessalonians and I & II Corinthians. On this Youth Sunday, some of us are perhaps at that point where we need the encouragement to clarify our own sense of purpose, especially with respect to being ambassadors for Christ. We need the kind of encouragement Paul saw it fit to give the early Christian communities in his letters to the new converts. We need the encouragement as budding ambassadors of Christ and Christianity.

“Get the Guns Campaign

Being an Ambassador for anything is not easy no matter the smiles. Just ask a brand ambassador for a company. The constant pressure to appear right and perfect is never easy. The difference with being ambassadors for Christ is that we can be serving Christ while we are always reforming and constantly seeking forgiveness. The Lord who calls us to be ambassadors does not require us to appear perfect instantly. Many of us come to Christ broken, shredded, “piece a piece” and it remains a seemingly long and arduous journey to be become whole. We see the same admission and appeal in the hymn we sung for the gradual. ‘We ask God not to turn his face from us, lamenting all our sinful lives...we’re even urging God not to call us to strict account for our guilty consciences, knowing how vile we shall appear’... We read in Psalm 22 the call of David to God... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? And we heard read today in Psalm 27 “Thy face Lord, do I seek; Hide not thy face from me”. We are not brand Ambassadors in the perfectionist sense that the world demands of its representatives....we are vessels in need of constant molding. Christian Ambassadors are the only ones who, when performances drop we are not immediately let go and left to wallow in financial ruin. In fact, Christ begs us to cling to him. The Gospel we are today called upon to spread across the lands represents God reaching out to us after our failures as ambassadors and not the other way around.

Paul himself was Saul the persecutor before he became the Apostle and ambassador for Christ. To me his transformation into an ambassador of the mission of Christ adds more credibility to his argument and encouragement. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby brings this alive in a 2014 sermon. He twins the notion of Christian ambassadorship with reconciliation. According to Archbishop Welby, such work is long and hard and stretches the resources of even the most loving human being.

But Archbishop Welby says the reconciliation of Christ is without limits. It is, because all we need is a reminder of the mercies God extends to us daily, even when we can confess to being undeserving that we can claim to be ambassadors for Christ. It is in that mix of not deserving yet being appointed that we deepen our ambassadorial commitment to Christ because we are able to follow Paul’s advice of being an example while setting one

ourselves. We are able to testify unto others as ambassadors for Christ, not just through our words but through the life we are living.

Now we partly understand why people will defend to the death even, their ‘good name’ through the courts and other means. That is why we have defamation lawsuits. (Up to recently we have been hearing a lot about those court actions by politicians. We leave that for another time). Essentially, as humans, we, almost instinctively, make attempts to ensure that we have good earthly names, that we are seen in our communities to be people of integrity; being good ambassadors.

Paul wants us this morning to transfer that same inclination above all else...that is to live the truth of God’s words, represent them sincerely and to stand firm in the Lord as ambassadors for Christ. We are called upon to join Paul’s call in Second Corinthians 5 and verse 20 to become ambassadors for Christ and imitate God in our daily lives