

“Selfies” of God

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's on the Green

Episcopal Church, May 17, 2016

In the name of the God who creates, redeems, and sustains us. Amen.

I work in higher education, a strange sort of working environment peppered with all kinds of eccentric personalities. First, there's the Type A colleagues, the ones who seek perfection in the minutiae that they often lose sight of the bigger picture. There are also the self-sacrificing colleagues who care so much about student success that they go above and beyond their normal call of duty and nearly burn themselves out. Then there are the colleagues who require a pat on the back for each and every accomplishment, large and small. They're the ones who will stop you in the hallway and alert you to their latest journal publication or invited conference presentation or committee they're chairing, and they will continue rattling off their *mini curriculum vitae* until you offer a word of praise. I love them, but a discourse on humility is one they clearly seem to have missed.

In a “selfie” culture we may wonder: what's the value in being humble? Tonight's Gospel from Mark (9:30-37) and the reading from James (4: 1-10) both remind us that humility draws us closer to God and to our true purpose in life. Jesus offers the ironic directive, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Basically, if you want your life to have real meaning and value, you must put yourself last and God first. Humble yourself. Think of the others with whom you share your God-given life.

Easier said than done.

Bishop Barbara Harris reminded us on Sunday that Jesus came from humble roots. He didn't earn a degree from a prestigious university. He never published any scholarly papers or a poetry

chapbook or secured a patent on a new invention. Yet he left humanity a tremendous legacy—all because he put God’s mission in the world first and himself last. He shared provocative and life-changing wisdom. He healed illnesses of all kinds. He sacrificed his earthly life. And he didn’t do any of it for the sake of glorifying himself. He did it because he recognized a true need in the world. In a way, he wasn’t unlike the colleagues I know who put their students’ needs as top priority.

God has given each of us gifts and talents to use and share with each other. I’m not saying we shouldn’t use them. But maybe we need to reevaluate what motivates us daily in using and sharing those gifts and talents. Do we do what we do because we’re looking for a pat on the back? Or do we do all that we do because we recognize God is the source of our gifts and talents, and wants to do His-Her work through us for God’s own purpose and glory and not our own? When we draw closer to God, when we sacrifice our egos, we become actualized—one with the One who already sees each and every one of us as precious. We are selfies of God. What further validation of our worth do we need than that?