

Allen Pruitt

I have to start by reminding you  
that I record these services on Thursday or Friday,  
in this case Friday.

I'm not often one to change my sermons for the events of the day,  
but this week has been so full of "happenings"  
that I can imagine that the gap between Friday and Sunday  
could very well expose some shortcomings,  
some things left unaddressed  
that need to be addressed.

Who knows?

Frankly,  
we never know.

Frankly,  
we live in a world that is always full of happenings and events.  
Sometimes they are big national events,  
things in our common life  
that no matter how we might wish to ignore them,  
they matter to us all.

In my own time in the Episcopal Church  
that has been 9/11,  
the war in Iraq,  
the pandemic,  
and now this insurrection of our democratic processes.

And more.

More things, probably,  
that rise to the level of what I've listed.

And that's not to mention the victories of our common life.

And more.

Certainly more things of consequence  
that don't rise to those levels.

And more besides:

The victories and the tragedies of my own small life.  
The victories and the tragedies that you have experienced,  
that you have invited me into.

We never know.

Our world,

our lives are full of happenings and events.

We can be overwhelmed by them.

Most of us can be overwhelmed

with just our day to day lives,

at least sometimes.

And so,

who knows?

Who knows what I'll have needed to say,

or how things might have changed

between writing

and recording

and Sunday morning?

But who ever knows?

The good news

is that God is present.

God is present when I am as eloquent as I always hope to be.

God is present when I stumble over my words.

God is present when you hear eloquence and beauty  
where I hear stumbling.

God is present when you shudder at my stumbling  
where I can only see eloquence.

God is present.

The question before us

in the midst of grave and weighty matters is

“What do we do?”

The question we ignore in the midst of our busyness,

the very question that our busyness distracts us from asking is,

“What am I really supposed to be doing?”

It’s a big question.

Too often we stay stuck in the small questions.

Fred Craddock,

wise sage of the North Georgia mountains once said,

“Even a really shiny penny  
is still just a penny.”

Even a really clever *small* question

is still a small question.

We need big questions.

Today, we ask some big questions in church.  
After the sermon,  
we will renew our own baptismal covenant.  
Big questions will be asked of us.

Will you continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship,  
in the breaking of the bread,  
and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil,  
and whenever you fall into sin,  
repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example  
the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
respecting the dignity of every human being?

The answer?  
I will,  
with God's help.

Those are big questions.

Perhaps, to our ears,  
they don't seem like the shiniest,  
most beautiful questions.

I have been an Episcopalian for 20 years now,  
and have heard and answered those questions 100 times over.

They often feel rote.  
And if not rote,  
then I am often lost  
in the demands these questions place on me.

"Oh. God,  
I can't even respect my own dignity,  
much less the dignity of that person I argued with the other day.

Oh God,  
I had a spiritual experience in the woods yesterday,  
how am I supposed to make it to church  
with any energy whatsoever  
for saying prayers and for fellowship?"

But I wonder.  
Can we learn to ask these big questions in new ways?  
Can we learn to ask those questions in ways that strike to our heart,  
in ways that don't empty us out,  
but instead empower us and fill us up?

Because here's the truth.

That's just five questions,

familiar to most of us by now.

Just five questions

and we will fail at one (or all) of them  
every single day.

And the truth is,

that's ok.

The Baptismal Covenant

is NOT meant

to be just one more thing

on our list of things to do.

It's not meant

to be one more thing

on our list of ways we fail.

Those lists are long enough as it is.

God's grace dictates

that God would not make that list even longer!

We already have a sense of dread,  
of being overtired by the world.

What if these questions were NOT one more thing to do,  
but instead,  
a resource for living  
in the overtired,  
dreary,  
dreadful world?

What if asking these questions of ourselves  
were a way to make the world more alive,  
more energetic,  
and more delightful?

Who knows?

Who knows what might happen?

This has been a difficult week.

For everyone.

We all face questions about how we contributed to this moment  
and questions about how we can be a force  
for moving us to a new moment.

What if we didn't just add those questions  
to our overflowing list of things to do or ways we fail?

What if we replaced those questions,  
replaced ALL our questions  
with just these five?

Typically we ask and answer these questions in this building.

Today might be the first time any of you have ever renewed your baptismal covenant at home.

The realities of the world dictate where we are.

A Pearl Harbor  
or a 9/11's worth of people  
dying every day.

And so we do our part to keep that number as low as we can.

We join together in new and creative ways.

In answer to one of the five questions,  
or perhaps,  
in answer to all five.

Prayers.  
Resisting evil  
Word and example  
Loving neighbor  
Respecting dignity

Perhaps it is just as well

that we ask and answer in our homes today.

Yes, we live these questions during our few precious hours at church,  
respecting the dignity of the priest you disagree with,  
making a faithful offering  
even when things don't go our way.

But more,

we live these questions,  
and answer them in our lives  
during the *other* 164 hours a week.

So ask these questions at home.

Answer them in the place you were always meant to answer them -  
out in God's good world,  
seeking to show God's goodness in it.



Will you join me?  
Will you pick me up when I fall?  
Will you trust me to pick you up  
and trust God  
that none of us will be left behind?

Will you come back to the biggest questions,  
as often as you can,  
trusting them to be a source of life,  
and not death?  
A source of grace,  
and not condemnation?

Will you offer the only answer you can,  
the simplest answer,  
not relying on your brilliance or mine,  
but on the trustworthy grace of God?

It's only five words,  
the same five words,  
answering those five big questions:

“I will, with God’s help.”