

A Sermon by the Rev. Canon Jack Frederick Nietert on the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 13, 2011 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

Our journey together

The following clever message was on a telephone answering device: "Who are you and what do you want? Most people spend a lifetime dealing with these questions, you have 20 seconds."

Today I want to look at those questions—mostly in terms of our being and just slightly in terms of our doing.

St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminded me of this task. Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters. I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ." Paul was reminding his readers that we are not spiritual entities. We are not angels or cherubim or seraphim. We are human beings... Paul calls us people of the flesh.

We are a body – mind – spirit combination. We are not a spirit simply trapped in a body; rather, we are a unique combination of body, mind and spirit. Each part of us influences the other parts. Try being spiritual when you have a hot ingrown toe nail. Try cheering up someone when you are in great pain yourself. My point is simply that we are a multi-faceted entity and that all facets are intertwined and relate to the whole.

Now, as human beings we spend our lives on a journey, a journey through life with all its ups and downs...and cul de sacs...and highways. And we, in particular, are people who have chosen to journey through life as Christians.

Well, who are we at St. Mark's? We are people who have come together to join a community. We are a community of people dedicated to working out our salvation with fear and trembling but knowing that God is working in us to do that very thing. We live the circle of spirituality—the circle of faith—as we journey and this circle is what I want to talk about for a few minutes.

Creation,
Sin,
Judgment,
Repentance, and
Redemption.

First **Creation**. Natural energy witnesses, but certainly the Biblical witness says that God, the creator, is personal and good. God is not simply some abstract force. God is personal and direct— Acting Willing Knowing Commanding Regretting Walking Descending Suffering Triumphanting. God is not something, but someone, not just a big grandfather or grandmother, but, nevertheless, related to personhood.

The Bible also asserts that God and all of God's creation is good and purposeful. Nothing is inherently evil and human beings, the crown of God's creation are made in God's image.

And finally, all creatures—great and small—including all human beings are dependent on the creator for their ongoing life.

The point is that all creation is grace. It didn't have to be but it is. In the biblical account of creation, five times God says, "That's good." On the sixth day God creates human beings and says, "That's very good." What all this means is that goodness and specialness are unconditional human attributes.

Believe it or not, this was considered radical stuff when Jesus came along. To emphasize the goodness of creation and to say everyone matters, everyone...that was radical.

Another biblical reality is that in creating, God took a calculated risk. God did not create robots but people with freedom of choice and you know what happened. **Sin** entered the picture—and every human being has been infected. The whole created order has been disrupted. The image of God is still present but it has become distorted...diseased.

Some are tempted to say, "Oh yes, we are now miserable worms and there is no health in us. Worms? Maybe, but more than that we are rebels! We rebel against God and want to live our way. And our way leads us to be alienated from God, from ourselves, from one another, and from all creations.

Pride out of order rules. We decide we will advise God according to our own wills. Where does that leave us? We are contradictory...We are free but unfree, worshipful but also idolatrous, capable of love but forever self-centered. And **Judgment**, God's judgment is God's refusal to give up on us.

An intervention takes place. Some event or person or circumstance happens that makes us stop, look and listen. It is God's road sign on the dead-end path we have been following. Usually it is only in retrospect—after much crying and foot stomping—that we see the hand of God behind such judgment. Success usually blinds us from judgment, but more often it is through our pain of failure that judgment and real growth take place.

And that leads the circle of spirituality to **Repentance** and **Redemption**. Even though we and all creation have been disrupted, that is not the last word. Evil is not essential. The bible says everything is redeemable. The Cross forever stands as our symbol that God can and does take the worst we can throw at him and turn it into the most profound victory the world has ever known.

God's love knows no bounds and God's power to transform—transfigure—evil into good is unlimited. Christ crucified become Christ resurrected. God gives us the grace to respond and we have to take the next step for ourselves—it's called "surrender." To respond is to repent and to return to God is redemption. Call it the circle of faith, the circle of spirituality.

You are here...that suggests that this is the path you are on. We, each of us, are perhaps at different points but nevertheless are moving towards the same destination, and the destination is our humanness being fulfilled, becoming like the one who became fully human for us—Jesus.

One last word, from Andrew Simus, "Treat every person with kindness and respect even those who are rude to you. Remember that you show compassion to others, not because of whom they are but because of what you are" and you are, in the circle of spirituality, becoming fully human.