

Sermon Preached on
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
(June 12, 2016)
"Keeping Up"

Today is Recognition Sunday.

As the name says, it's all about recognizing the learning & teaching that goes on here. To be an effective Christian, you have to keep up with learning - all ages! You have to keep up with scripture. Have to keep up with Justice and servanthood issues. Social movements. You have to keep up with the world so you can bring the gospel to those who need it - and that's everyone.

Recognition Sunday is where we recognize high school seniors, too - going off to college - and boy, if ever there's a place where you have to keep up, it's college! But that's okay because what they'll be learning in college is mostly how to keep up in an ever-changing world. Education is all about keeping up. Even priests have to keep up. Even we have to keep learning. In fact, just this past week, I was in school. We were learning how to use the Internet, especially social media - to be a more effective church. You know, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Vimeo. Blogs, video logs, podcasts - not to mention e-mail and text messages are all part of ministry today. Churches are using video conferencing and online learning. One church we encountered has an online bible study because parishioners have too hard a time making it in person. Another church has online meditations and prayer requests and videos teaching about God - all available for the world to see. *We* already put our entire service on PDF so you can worship without turning pages or switching from book to book. (Ironically, not today). Then there's YouTube. Did you know we already have a St. James' YouTube channel? You can watch our fireside chats and listen to sermons on YouTube. And with a little more work, we can have our services broadcast live for anyone who can't make it to church on a Sunday. Cool, huh?

And there is so much more. Ever hear of Episcopal Cafe? Google it. Ever hear of GrowChristians? Look it up. How about Inward/Outward? All online ministries with great articles, prayers and hints for how to be a Christian today.

Now, you might say people spend too much time on computers already, so why encourage it? The answer is, this is where the people are, and our Lord commanded us to go out into the world where the people are to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. If the world is online, that's where the Gospel needs to be. We are called to do as Jesus himself did, and in today's gospel it says, "He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." If we say we don't want to be part of the computer generation, that doesn't mean people will stop living online - it just means they won't hear or experience the Gospel from us.

Or to put it another way, I recently read a prayer (online) that I'd like to share with you:

Christ Has No Online Presence but Yours

Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours,
Yours are the tweets through which love touches this world,
Yours are the posts through which the Gospel is shared,
Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed.
Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours.

(by Meredith Gould)

If people are online - then so is Christ. You as an individual can proclaim Christ's love, and I hope and pray you do: it is the responsibility of the church to do so. Episcopalians in general have been late to the game, but we *have* made some strides over the years. It's only been fifteen years since St. James' created its first website. When was the last time you looked? We have a Facebook page, too. If you have Facebook, have you liked our page? These are the portals through which most people who are interested in a church go these days -without a website - a *good* website - you're sunk.

So I have a quick exercise for you: take out your cellphones. I know, I normally tell you to keep them out of sight, but today is different. If you have a smartphone, get online and open up the St. James' website. Next, go to the "Ministries" drop down file and tell me what the first ministry listed is. Now, you *could* tell me by raising your hand. Or you could text me or tweet me at @ckramer61.

So you see, Sunday school students are not the only ones who need to learn, who need to keep up with the world. We *all* are, and if we want to speak to an increasingly tech-savvy world, it will be with the help of technology. Telling our story in the old way will not be heard.

In short... I - we - need your help. We need someone who can put lots and lots of pictures and events on Facebook - sort of a Facebook curator. We need a Twitter teacher who is willing to post church events and faithful reflections. We need bloggers and movie makers and people who can code.

None of this takes away from what we do here. One of the interesting ironies about young people today is that they actually *like* many of the traditions we share. They appreciate that we preach God's love, that life is eternal, that we seek justice and reconciliation for all. It's just that in order for people to know about these things, it requires an online presence.

There's a lot I don't understand about the Internet, but I do understand this: as a parish, we have an obligation to get out in to world. If we don't, we will turn our back on the work given us – and we will turn our back on our neighbors.

But if we stick our necks out, challenge ourselves, take a leap of faith, it will lead us - and those whose lives we touch - toward the land of promise. Amen.