

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

Epiphany VI b

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Pr. Robert M. Goldstein

*Get On With Your Life*

Texts: John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48a

How did the Gospel reading go with you? Did your mind wander? Hey, it's OK. It's not so bad. We who are conditioned by TV commercials and MTV, it's hard to concentrate with just our ears and just on words. Being able to focus so intensely on spoken words, let alone to deal with silence takes time and self-reflection.

And perhaps we are making too much of words. Words, words, words, and more words. For Christianity is a life -- not just a collection of words. And this subtle point gets lost sometimes in the effort, in the struggles, to make sense of our faith to others and to ourselves.

My few words of advice to you this morning? Get a life! -- not more words and knowledge. Get the life, the life in Christ. Actually, you already have it. You are already baptized into it. So my advice is, get on with your life in Christ!

This is the point of the Gospel reading. It's a lot of words because it is very hard to communicate life in Christ. Haven't there been times in your life when you just couldn't find the words to communicate something so important to you? Well, that's what's so wonderful about the Gospels -- they are trying to communicate to you a way of life -- and, even though this is very difficult, they still often succeed! That's why we call them "Holy."

It's the stories, the psalms and the poetry of the Bible that are the better communicators of life in God and in Christ -- rather than the almost flat reading of our Gospel for today.

In the Gospel reading by concentrating on just the words, we probably only hear

obeying Jesus' commandment to love. But there's a whole lot more. The paradox of commanding someone to love someone else gives the clue. You can't command me to love you. If anything saying something like that will get in the way.

But if your ears and eyes and heart are tuned in to beholding a life and not just words, then you will hear from the reading love and more love. Joy and more joy... And the exhortation to abide in Christ's love. This is more than words. This is more than feelings. Abiding means living a life with a sense of forgiveness, a sense of frailty and of deep joy that we can begin each day afresh and full of hope -- for the source of this emotional life is Christ in us and among us. It's really hard to put that reality into words.

But that it is more than words -- indeed not really about words, is profoundly shown by the fact that Jesus never wrote anything -- as far as we know. Only through the memories of Jesus' disciples have we received Jesus' word pictures, the parables, and the sound bites such as "the first shall be last and the last, first." But, more importantly, we have words about a life Jesus lives where the life is the important thing and the words are only a ladder to it.

And what a life we see! It is a life of a truly righteous person who becomes our mentor, rather than our Lord. For the word "Lord" is not a healthy religious notion at all in our times. In a world when most were slaves or servants of others, the word "Lord" had power and it's transference to Jesus was a naturally healthy action.

Yet even Jesus in the Gospel says, "I do not call you servants any longer, but friends." Here is a true friend who saves us from ourselves, gives us a way of seeing a way of life happily. Here is a friend who is our mentor and leader in a life lived in forgiving and inclusive grace. Get on with that life.

It's hard to communicate that life to others in words. And once you see that, fundamentalism in all its forms, fundamentalism of the book, fundamentalism of church doctrine and fundamentalism of religious cultures -- they all fade in the bright

light of the life of living, actually living in Christ. This is the victory that conquers the world -- to use the struggling words of our second reading.

The reading from the Book of Acts is another good example that getting on with our Christian life is the whole point of the game. The Apostle Peter, no less, is a reminder that we can be living the Christian life but only partially. It's like being only partially alive and yet also somewhat in denial.

Peter was still in the grip of words and culture as the ultimate religious truth. The Words of the Torah and the culture of its interpretation that he inherited from his good religious upbringing trained him to assume that Jews were in a privileged relationship to God. So it took God three times to convince him to eat pork and welcome these Gentile children of God -- three times before he got it. And it probably took three times before he realized that a life, a living life with all its goodness from God, was more important than the dogmas of his ancient and great religion.

Here were Gentiles, unclean to his training as a Jew. But he finally realized that how they lived could only be the work of the Spirit of God. Life was changing the fundamentalisms of doctrines and religious culture. Life in the Spirit of God and of Christ. The truth of life in Christ trumped the truths of long held of doctrines.

We know that too well at St. Francis, as we have been made alive in our witness, that the Holy Spirit has fallen upon a new kind of "Gentiles" in the Lutheran and the other churches. The Holy Spirit has fallen upon the gays, the lesbians, the transgendered, the bisexual and the heterosexuals together. One Spirit -- one people of God. Now given this wonderful reality, let's get on with this life ahead of us. We have challenges ahead of us as a church. But, alive in the Spirit of Christ, let's take them on as opportunities for life together. Exciting isn't it!

At the ELCA in assembly last Friday I was stunned at the lack of leadership in this synod in having a conversation of our sexual lives in Christ. It was clear that their leaders want to avoid the risks of growing in Christ, of being made alive in Christ, by

moving out of denial. Sounds like Peter.

I was appalled. And as I mulled over the disappointment yesterday, it reminded me again that St. Francis is an extraordinary congregation indeed. A place where the good news is alive, living and lived. It was heartening also that there are many others at the synod assembly who are equally disappointed and who are trying to live the life of dialog and risk, to get on with living in Christ -- hungering for leadership like Peter who finally assented to the work of the Spirit in front of his nose.

So listen to the words of Scripture. But listen for the Living Word, as Luther put it. In the words hear Christ speaking to you, exhorting you, to get on with your life. As Luther again put it, the words offer you a glimpse of the baby Jesus. When you see the baby Jesus, God's child, then you realize are alive, living in Christ.

Amen.

St. Francis Lutheran Church  
152 Church Street, SF, CA 94114-1111  
Phone: (415) 621-2635; Fax: (415) 621-8819  
E-mail: StFrancisSF@sbcglobal.net  
[www.st-francis-lutheran.org](http://www.st-francis-lutheran.org)