Rev. Jason Wells

December 6, 2020

Christ Episcopal Church-Exeter

Mic Check

1. MIC CHECK On August 19, 2017, I went to Boston with two other Episcopal priests. This was for a so-called “Free Speech Rally,” plotted by a handful of hucksters of hate and Holocaust denial. The Rally also draw tens of thousands of protesters, of which we were three. We assembled with the crowd in chaos. We struggled to find other clergy or even to get our bearings on where we were going as a group.

Then, among all the noise and mass of people, someone shouted, “Mic check!” The noisy crowd snapped to attention as one. “Mic check!” everyone around us shouted back. The original leader began to shout out directions about where we were going and how we would conduct ourselves. She had no amplification so her technique was a Human Microphone: every four or five words, she would stop and the crowd shouted them back.

Her word, carried into and through us, made chaos into order, made individuals into one body, made our march safe and orderly and made our voice clear: today, the voice of hate would not overcome the word of love.

2. THE VOICE AND THE WORD

This morning we read about John the Baptist and his preaching: he says , “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23). John tells us about Jesus, the one coming after him, about Jesus, who is the Word of God. There is no coincidence that John calls himself the Voice while proclaiming Jesus the Word.

Word and Voice belong together. The purpose of voice is, though speech and song, to make Words clear, intelligible and known. Just like the Human Microphone calls the Mic Check and then directs the march, so it is that the Word of God calls chaos into order and calls light into darkness and speaks love in the place of hate.

The saintly Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, explained it like this, “God’s best microphone is Christ, and Christ’s best microphone is the Church, and the Church is all of you.”

He went on:“God’s best microphone is Christ, and Christ’s best microphone is the Church, and the Church is all of you. Let each one of you, in your own job, in your own vocation —nun, married person, bishop, priest, high school or university student, day laborer, wage earner, market woman—one in your own place … live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God our Lord.”

We, baptized individuals and parishes and denominations, are microphones of God, intended to give Voice to the Word. We know that God’s Word is itself Love—Love incarnate, Love made human flesh. “God shows his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We know that giving Voice to God’s Word happens in speech and in our actions through acts of Love as Jesus commanded us: “That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

3. COUNCIL OF CHURCHES VOICES THE WORD The purpose behind the NH Council of Churches is to be the Mic Check for all of us as baptized Christians. Yes, we each individually give voice to God’s word of love. Yes, our parishes give voice in our worship and out outreach. Yes, our denominational bodies and leaders give voice to God’s word of love in their own setting. And as the NH Council of Churches we recognize that we often need a united

Voice for God's word of love remains the same whether we belong to Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal churches and any other denomination.

A. In 2019, the Council organized those nine denominations to bring a united voice to repeal the death penalty in our state. The Episcopal Church and all the other churches have official statements that the Gospel of life cannot include the death penalty. As a united Christian voice we were able to organize alongside Jewish, Catholic and other faith voices as well as secular opponents of capital punishment. After decades of work, 2019 was the year our state became a state that has no death penalty due in no small part to the organized witness from churches giving voice to God's word of love.

B. For several years now, the Council helped organize Prayer Vigils outside the ICE offices in Manchester. We gather at the imposing brutalist building whenever we know of New Hampshire immigrant families who have been summoned under potential threat of deportation. We gather because we believe in the power of prayer and because we read God's Word in the Scriptures for courage and solidarity. Between 30 and 50 people gather there, in all sorts and conditions of weather, faithfully to offer their prayers and support for the summoned immigrant families.

(Even this Wednesday, December 9, we will be there at 9am to support Eliezer Ayala and find out if he can stay here where he has lived for twenty years with his wife and children or must return to Honduras, recently ravaged by hurricanes.) I can't help but believe that ICE chooses to deport fewer people and to keep more families together as a result of people of faith gathering to sing, pray and voice together God's word of love.

C. While we are an organization made up of Churches, the Council regularly convenes the interfaith communities statewide. Earlier this year the Council called together the Catholic,

Evangelical, Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist communities as we responded to COVID. Despite the differences in our faiths, many of our activities are similar: gathering people, singing, sharing food, expressing affection through hugs and handshakes. And so we gathered to advise Governor Sununu on the most effective ways to limit the spread of COVID through all our Places of Worship. Since then, the Council has been a point of contact for all our faiths and denominations to stay awake to the rising numbers of COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths so that we can make the best decisions to keep one another safe, again as an expression of God's love.

D. Finally, the Council has this year fostered conversations on faith and race relations. Immediately after the police murder of George Floyd, NH denominational leaders issued a letter jointly calling out our churches and people to work to end racial inequities right here our own state. We hosted an online book study on theologian James Cone's book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, helping to understand racism through the lens of Christian faith.

Just last week, we welcomed about 85 participants in an interfaith conversation between Protestant, Catholic and Jewish representatives to open a new conversation as people of faith. On January 7 at 6pm, we will host our next interfaith conversation on race, examining Governor Sununu's report on the racial disparities of rates of COVID cases. You are welcome to join us and details will be posted tomorrow on nhchurches.org.)

4. CONCLUSION

And so we remember that it was John the Baptist who came to say, "I am the voice." The Voice which comes right before the Word: the Word of Love, the Word of Incarnate Love that we celebrate in Jesus Christ.

So we call ourselves together reminding ourselves of the words of Oscar Romero, "God's best microphone is Christ, and Christ's best microphone is the Church, and the Church is all of

you. Let each one of you, in your own job, in your own vocation…live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God our Lord."

Because when we live this faith, we know that this is the faith that demands the mic check. It demands that we join together and speak light into darkness and love into hate. We do believe that our prayers work. We do believe that speaking the words of love makes a difference. We know that our faith can change the world and save the world.