

**Proper 4B – 2018 (ECW SUNDAY)**

1 Samuel 3:1-10, [11-20]

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23-3:6

Back in March in Cherry Hill, our Diocesan Convention passed **RESOLUTION 2018-3**: (The Subject of the resolution was the Episcopal Church Women. It reads):

*The support and acknowledgment of the work of Episcopal Church Women in the Diocese each year with the third Sunday of May being proclaimed "ECW Sunday" throughout the Diocese of New Jersey Be it resolved, That the 234th Convention of the Diocese of New Jersey support and appreciate the work and ministry of ECW throughout the Diocese and, in acknowledgement thereof, hereby designates the third Sunday in May to be "ECW Sunday" from this Convention and on into the future, and be it, Further resolved, That parishes throughout the Diocese of New Jersey demonstrate their support of ECW with prayer and designated collections to be used by the Diocesan ECW to further its work of mission and ministry.*

Because of our traditionally large Pentecost celebration on the third Sunday in May this year, we postponed our observance of ECW Sunday to today. We acknowledge and celebrate the women of the

Episcopal Church, especially those in our parish. A little later, Louise Wagner, our current ECW President, will speak to you directly about the ECW in our parish. For the moment, I want to return to the Bible lessons for today and look more closely at the lesson from Second Corinthians. Paul is recognizing that the church in Corinth is in a bad time. Their circumstances are not favorable. But, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that God is still with him and with them; they must pray for the power to push forward and move toward a better time. Paul says:

**<sup>8</sup>We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;**

It is the nature of human life and organizations that we have cycles of ups and downs. Who in this church has not had times in their life when they could not see the way back to joy and happiness or at least a stable and calm moment? Our church has had times of strength and fruitfulness and times of great difficulty and trial. All of history points to this need to maintain hope through the hard times and to act creatively when the old solutions do not work any longer. I am hoping that last Wednesday night that Bishop Stokes gave you a word of hope

and encouragement to approach the future with an open mind and a creative mind.

At Bishop Councill's funeral last Tuesday, his good friend and colleague, Alan Gates, the Bishop of Massachusetts, gave a eulogy about the five things Bishop George loved. Number 3 was music. Bishop Gates said: "George Councill loved music. Concert going; drumming in the basement; playing air guitar in a hospital bed. His joy when singing was irrepressible...He was musically omnivorous, conversant on a range of musicians from Verdi to the hip hop artist Mos Def. I once heard him construct an entire Easter sermon around Chumbawamba, the '90s British Rock band and their hit sensation, "Tubthumping." Do you remember its catchy chorus?

I get knocked down, but I get up again  
You are never gonna keep me down  
I get knocked down, but I get up again  
You are never gonna keep me down

I mean, sure, there's an Easter message in there. But who thinks to preach a sermon on Chumbawamba, on Easter Day, in well-heeled Lake Forest (Illinois)? George, that's who! The man's appetite for music was prodigious – and there was always a gospel message in their somewhere.

I encourage you to go online and read or listen to the whole eulogy and the one given by Presiding Bishop Curry. Bishop Councill was a great friend to our church. It was his enthusiasm in the face of Father Terry's proposal that resulted in your ability to live into ministry in this place. We ministered here together because in the face of obstacles, this church persevered with hope and looked for a new way.

The ECW organization grew out of a population that was frustrated with the way things were going. They were not happy with the leaders of their church. They were very dissatisfied with the distribution of resources, specifically the use of money by the powers of the church. The time was the period after the Civil War. The government was reconstructing itself and the South. Women were rebuilding families and homes without the millions of husband and sons and fathers who were lost in the war and caring for millions of others who were permanently wounded in body, mind and spirit by the long conflict. Women did not have any vote and were not part of civic government. Likewise, they were not allowed to take part in Episcopal parish or church government.

This was a period of tremendous church growth. At the beginning of Lincoln's presidency, one in seven Americans were

church members. By 1900, over half of the population were affiliated with a church.<sup>i</sup> The church grew, in part, because women began church schools for children, Bible studies for adults, systems of support for missionaries at home and abroad and were directly involved in social services in their own communities. The church grew because there were great missionary efforts to convert people living on the frontier in Midwest. Our written church histories revere Jackson Kemper and James Lloyd Breck, missionary bishops in places like Indiana, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Nebraska. Breck and his wife eventually travelled to open Episcopal missions in California. Working with them were uncounted and unremembered women who established centers of Christian service that operated while the Bishops on horseback travelled around the countryside.

Episcopal women, black and white, worked diligently to grow the church and increase the faith during these years. They began to network with one another and share projects and funds. This was necessary because the men of the church refused to fund their priorities or recognize their significant roles in administering these programs. They decided that a separate organization, with its own funding structure, was needed. At the 30th General Convention, held

in Baltimore in 1871, the Board of Missions was authorized to organize a Women's Society. The most well-known women from this period were the Emery Sisters. Mary Emery wrote to every rector in the United States to ask that they organize an auxiliary or connect their existing women's group to the new national organization. The first Triennial Meeting was held in 1874 at the same time and place as the 31st General Convention. 66 women from 5 states gathered. By the second Triennial Meeting in 1877, 48 dioceses had formally organized groups.<sup>ii</sup> In true church tradition, Julia Chester Emery served as secretary of this Auxiliary for 40 years. Two of her other sisters, Susan and Theresa, wrote for a children's publication on missions and sent supplies to missionaries in the field. You may be surprised, as I was, to know that 50% of the missionaries in the field were women, supported by women. By 1922, the group had reorganized into the national outreach giant, funding projects at home and around the world, with chapters in almost every parish. They worked this way until the 1970's, with the influence of the women's power movement, when their mission shifted from strictly outreach to focus more on empowering women for a life of discipleship.

The current website of ECW describes themselves this way:

We are Episcopal Church Women of all ages, ethnic origins and socioeconomic backgrounds who hold a variety of views. However, the common denominator of our members is love of God and the wish to do His work.<sup>iii</sup>

**Their vision is:** As the eyes, ears, hands, and heart of Christ in the world, we will persist in the work of healing, justice, and peace.

Our ECW are quite often the eyes, ears, hands and hearts of Christ in our own congregation and in our community. Through their works on behalf of our own church and their outreach, here at home and through their diocesan and national networks – they are active disciples of Jesus. Despite obstacles, they do not lose heart.

The way of Jesus follows the life of Jesus. It has obstacles and challenges. Like the Christians in Corinth, we need to be reminded that God is with us. The life and work of our ECW is a sign and symbol that the Holy Spirit is active. We thank them. We encourage them. And, as the resolution calls for, we pray for them:

*Almighty God, Heavenly Father, source of all knowledge and truth, be present with each of (them members of the Episcopal Church Women.) Grant (them) open minds, compassionate hearts, honest words and gentle ways. Give (them) the grace to know your will, the courage to accept it and the strength to accomplish it. May (they) not forget the lessons from the past nor fear the challenges of the future.*

*Bless(them) with your peace today and all the days to come, and may (they) ever pray, "Thy will be done". We, with them, live in your presence and pray in your Holy Name. **Amen***<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup>Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *Living with History*, p. 44.

<sup>ii</sup>

<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5831f34803596e27e244f977/5831f750379f94a1d48c119d/5831f809379f94a1d48c1606/1479669769946/3main.pdf?format=original>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.ecwnational.org/resources/our-history>

<sup>iv</sup>Adapted from: <http://www.epicenter.org/ecw/>