

## BE IT RESOLVED

Saint Paul's Cathedral, San Diego  
Proper 8C; June 27, 2010  
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*Gracious God,*

*Let these words be more than words and give us the spirit of Jesus.*

*Amen.*

The themes of resolution and intention stand out in our readings this morning. Elisha, suddenly called to be a prophet of God by Elijah, burns his farming tools and kills his livestock, offering the meat as a final feast for family and friends. The decision has been made. There's no possibility of turning back. He'll starve if he ever tries to return to farming.

Paul, in his great declaration of independence, reminds his friends to walk the path of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. There is, sadly, another path but those who love Jesus have left it behind. There's no turning back; why return to slavery after you've received the gift of freedom?

Jesus makes the same point in the gospel. He is rejected in Samaria (no surprise) and then, on his way to the cross - on his way to uncertainty, betrayal, pain, and death - he attempts to engage new followers. They, understandably, have human concerns to address. The first takes comfort in the notion of home, a place to lay one's head. The second simply asks to bury his father. The third just wants to say goodbye to his kin. Jesus doesn't make any room for any of that. Now is the moment of decision. Either be resolved or be gone.

That's a bit hard for us to take today. We don't like being so tightly bound and we dread those who, in the name of God, are fanatically resolved and, on occasion, deadly. So we take it with a grain of salt. We hear it as biblical hyperbole but then return to the heart of the message. Jesus is right: it is hard to grow in any endeavor without significant commitment. Excellent violinists need to be completely dedicated. Great soccer players are more than a bit rabid about their sport. Should we expect it to be any different in the spiritual realm? Without resolution, without fixed intention, our hopes for spiritual growth are probably just that - hopes that won't be realized. We'll muddle through (praising God that we're saved by grace, not human effort) but we'll never know the perfect freedom that Paul extols this morning, the freedom that comes, ironically, through intensive submission.

But now, having said that, let's come back for a moment to our doubts about the matter, our reasonable discomfort with spiritual intensity. We are right to be concerned about the overly zealous. James and John, in their rush to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans, remind us of the shadow side of religious power. They are sternly rebuked. So, acknowledging that intent matters and zealousness destroys, let me ask this: what do we, 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples, do with Saint Alban? I bring it up because he was honored this week in our cycle of prayers.

Alban was the first Christian martyr in England. He was a soldier in the Roman army who offered safe haven to a priest fleeing imperial persecution. This all occurred before

the conversion of Constantine, the first baptized emperor – 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century. When the search party came to the house, Alban swapped garments with the cleric and gave himself up. He was immediately tortured and executed. Just before his death, when asked to state his name, he offered this testimony: “My parents named me Alban. I worship and adore the living and true God, who created all things” - his last words.

So, again, what do we do with that? Alban was all-in, a true mensch, a stand-up guy, a brave and beautiful soul, but it’s still a sad ending. He was resolved. He had a fixed intention. He ended up in an early grave. Christian history is replete with such folk and, sadly, today’s headlines from around the globe echo the theme. Too many people tear down in the service of bad religion and too many people are victimized by the same. So how do we move beyond that? How do we live a life of healthy resolution and intention? How do we walk a path that absolutely honors God and is life-giving, not life-denying, not one more sad drama in the cycle martyrs and killers, victims and persecutors?

There are abundant Christian witnesses in history who advise on that question but, for the moment, let’s turn to a Hindu who loved Jesus. One of the most influential books in my life was the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi. I was nineteen when I bought it – searching, wondering, questioning. Gandhi gave me hope in that moment. I learned, for instance, that he read the Sermon on the Mount every day, so I did too. He was powerfully drawn to Christ, but refused to become a Christian because of the negative associations the missionaries in India left on him; too much James and John, perhaps – too fiery. He turned to his own scriptures, especially the Bhagavad-Gita. He discovered that he still had work to do – it wasn’t easy reading. The Gita begins with war, familial conflict (the worst kind). The hero is encouraged – by a divine figure, no less! – to slay his most beloved. If you think our readings this morning are stark, read the opening chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita.

But Gandhi stayed with it and realized, in time, that none of this had anything to do with human history – this was a composite of psychology and mythology. The battle was not taking place on some long-forgotten sun-drenched plain in India but within Gandhi’s own soul. This was not a war narrative but a call to a deeper spirituality. With great resolve and a pure intention, tracking Saint Paul very precisely, Gandhi felt compelled to contend with his own licentiousness, idolatry, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, envy. These were inner battles for him – there was no enemy out in the world but there were internal issues that required attention. By taking it inward, Gandhi found he could own all of it. He was every character in the drama. The whole story revealed his inner life and, praise God, he had eyes to see. He bravely took on the challenge of personal transformation – his decades-long effort to grow in discipline, love, and wisdom allowed for immensely effective action in the world in the years that followed. Irony: this ancient war narrative ended up shaping the soul of the great modern prophet of non-violence.

And so it is with us. We pray for a pure intention this morning. We resolve to do the hard work of growing up in the Spirit. To that end and following Gandhi’s lead, let’s conclude by looping back to Saint Alban’s story and apply the principle of interiority, of taking the story to heart. Moving away from one more martyrs’ narrative by recognizing the timeless and metaphorical nature of Alban’s witness, we ask: What part of your priestly identity are you willing to take on today? Will the warrior within you trade garments with the priest? And, if so, what will necessarily be sacrificed by allowing for that possibility?