



Jesus Christ Pantocrator ("Ruler of All") from the [deesis mosaic](#) in [Hagia Sophia](#) (Holy Wisdom), Greek Orthodox Cathedral, [Istanbul](#)

Mosaic 1: August 2019

Dear All Saints Friends in Christ,

Our "Church Growth Task Force" met last month to pray, brainstorm, and discuss ways the Holy Spirit is inspiring us at All Saints to both grow our faith individually and to bring (new) people to Jesus. Among the awesome ideas that came out of that meeting were:

1. Do a children's sermon each week
2. Ask everyone to prayerfully invite and bring friends to church each week
3. Be intentional about welcoming new people at church and coffee hour while respecting their space and avoiding making anyone feel left out.
4. Run a Fall Alpha course and Holy Spirit weekend - with the entire congregation invited to participate in the Holy Spirit Weekend, even if they are not on the current Alpha Course.

I think we are off to a great start on all of these areas. Three Children's sermons have gone out on three consecutive Sundays - Parents (and Uncle) way to bring the kids! At least one guest has come to church with a parishioner - thanks Steven; and we are planning our Fall Alpha to kick off for some time late September, with a Holy Spirit weekend planned for November 8 and

9 - mark you calendars! Our second Church Growth Task force meeting is scheduled for this coming Monday, August 5th at 7pm in the Parish Hall - please join us! It's a great chance to listen to and share what the Holy Spirit is saying to each of us about how we can grow!

One of the ideas expressed at our first meeting was for me to communicate directly with the Parish in some written form on a regular basis. I thought about what to call this: letter seemed too formal; blog too generic - so I settled on Mosaic: pictures made by putting pieces of glass together like a puzzle. So here is my first Mosaic! I hope this helps convey a picture of Jesus - who He is, what He is doing, and how we are part of His creative work at All Saints.

The big "Elephant in the Room" is the current conflict our Diocese faces with the wider Episcopal Church USA over issues of Human Sexuality and Gay Marriage. I don't claim to be able to solve this puzzle, but I'd like to piece together a few thoughts that might frame this conflict in a way that I hope can help unify us as a church so we can serve every person that Jesus entrusts us to care for as a precious child of God. Here are some pieces of the picture, and the general framework for the picture, I'd like to discuss.

1). There is a diversity of opinions about these issues in our church, in our diocese, in the Anglican Communion, and in the wider church - Catholic, Orthodox, and virtually every Christian denomination. In my view, the only opinion that matters is Jesus' opinion - it is His ideal on these subjects what we aspire to. Our means of discerning His opinion about these subjects are the same tools we have to discern any matter. If you take our Fall Alpha course don't miss the talk on "How Does God Guide Us?" where 5 C-S's are given as a way to remember How God speaks to us, which I'll summarize here:

- I. **Commanding Scripture** - the Bible Tells us God's General will.
- II. **Council of the Saint's** - both through the ages, and trusted advisors in our current day.
- III. **Compelling Spirit** - the Holy Spirit speaks to us individually in various ways.
- IV. **Circumstantial Signs** - the sovereignty of God helps us discern his will through coincidences
- V. **Common Sense** - God gave us intellect, as St. Anselm said: Faith Seeks understanding.

In my view, many well meaning people are trying to discern God's will through these "CSs" or channels/modes of hearing from God and coming up with diverse answers. Some people hear God saying different things through the same channel - for example one person may feel the Holy Spirit it telling them something that is different than another person. This is normal - the Holy Spirit speaks to each of us in different ways, and none of us hear perfectly, which is why we need community! Sometimes different channels seem to give us conflicting answers and one must decide what takes priority - for example an individual might find scripture saying one thing but their common sense or circumstantial signs saying something else. The challenge we face in these matters is not different than the challenge the church has faced through the ages: discerning what God is calling us to understand and do while we "See through the mirror darkly" (1 Cor 13:12) . Jesus will not fail us - if we are seeking Him and His will, He will make clear our path in time. Scripture and church history has shown us that sometimes the road is

bumpy, but if we are seeking Him, and His will, I'm confident He will make clear to us the Way. The goal is not for us to be right in our own opinion, but to be in right relationship with the one who's opinion alone matters. Very often the religious people were surprised by Jesus opinion. We have to listen to God carefully, read scripture carefully, and pray fervently for clarity in our path.

2) Our nation and our world is becoming increasingly divisive over this and other social issues, and the discourse of attacking one another is not helpful. Tim Kellor, a well known pastor who I respect greatly, wrote a great piece on "Rules for Theological Debate" that I feel is helpful in any dispute. His rules are summarized below and can be found in full here:

<http://andynaselli.com/tim-keller-6-principles-for-how-to-argue-when-you-disagree>

1. Take full responsibility for even unwitting misrepresentation of others' views.
2. Never attribute an opinion to your opponents that they themselves do not own.
3. Take your opponents' views in their entirety, not selectively.
4. Represent and engage your opponents' position in its very strongest form, not in a weak "straw man" form.
5. Seek to persuade, not antagonize—but watch your motives!
6. Remember the gospel and stick to criticizing the theology- only God sees the heart.

I think this guidance is as useful and necessary in debating theological issues as when debating any political issue. Jesus prayed that "They all would be one" (John 17:21) and challenged us to "Pray for our Enemies" (Mathew 5:43). Our goal is not to win points and feed resentments, but rather to understand, learn from each other, and together align ourselves with Jesus. Try these rules out when debating your favorite issue at a summer barbecue - see if you can state your opponents view in terms they agree with. I think you will be surprised at how the tone of the discussion can change.

3) Putting the pieces together. If we put these two pieces of the puzzle together I think we get more than the sum of the parts. Listening to God through all of the channels available to us, while engaging even our most distant Brothers and Sisters in Christ through positive dialogue can help us grow closer as a church and closer to God. Paul warns us against factions (1 Cor 10). We are united with all followers of Jesus that share the essential truths of our faith as described in the Creeds - whether liberal or conservative, high church or low church, sacramental or pentacostal, those emphasizing scripture and those emphasizing social justice - by life giving faith in Jesus Christ!

The message of the Gospel is very simple: God loves You! If we get all of the practices above right - hear God, have respectful discourse with other Christians and people of other faiths, even capture profound stances on the difficult issues of the day, but do not bring this message and experience of God's Love to everyone who comes to All Saints, we will have missed the whole point. I love the Hymn written Peter Sholtes in the 1960's when he was leading an inter-racial youth group in the South Side of Chicago: "They will know we are Christians by our Love."

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will work with each other, we will work side by side
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

Let us paint that picture of Jesus together and see the beauty we can create. Bring your piece of the puzzle to the table, and let Jesus place it into a more beautiful work of art that is the New Creation. I am honored to be able to share that process with you at All Saints. Hang on - It's gonna be a wild ride! May we together bring honor and Glory to Jesus Name!

Peace in Christ,

Scott+