

Sermon for the Memorial Service of Clifton King

by Pr. Bea Chun

Saturday, October 26, 2019

St. Francis Lutheran Church



Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28).

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28). So we heard in today's gospel reading.

In other places Jesus has been recorded as saying:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 8)

And in another place we read:

And Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" (Mark 16)

Clearly, Jesus wanted us to go out into all the world.

Except, here in San Francisco, this is hardly necessary--because all the world comes to San Francisco. People from every nation under heaven and from every walk of life have arrived at our door steps--people from all kinds of cultures and all kinds of backgrounds--old and young, rich and poor, famous and unknown.

And Clifton talked to all of them. Or at least to a good many of them. *I talk to everyone*, he always said.

And then, the City of San Francisco has its own worlds to serve up, rollerskating nuns, pavement dwellers, crossfit runners, yoga moms, drag queens, teachers, dancers, activists con-artists, supervisors, delivery people, shop keepers, demonstrators, dog walkers, sleep walkers.

And Clifton talked to them all. Or at least to a good many of them. *I talk to everyone*, he always said.

And then, there is this building--the place where we worship and where we gather for fellowship. It has an upstairs and a downstairs. Some people spend most of their time upstairs--they come to worship, and then they go home. And some people spend most of their time downstairs--they attend meetings or come to one of the food programs, and then they go home.

And Clifton talked to all of them, or at least to a good many of them. *I talk to everyone*, he always said.

In this way Clifton also functioned like a bridge, a bridge between all these different worlds: the upstairs and the downstairs people; the insiders and the outsiders; the people from around the corner; and the people from the other side of the globe.

He talked to everyone, and talk he did. Clifton often came to work a little early just so he could spend a few minutes sitting in the office and chatting about this, that, and the other.

And always, without fail, he arrived neatly dressed and color coordinated; and he managed to stay neat, even when he had to perform some of the more dirty jobs that come with an urban location. And nothing fazed him--dirty toilets, dirty dishes, messy sidewalks--he took it all in stride and rarely lost his cool.

Although, he did want to have things done a certain way . . . chairs had to be stacked just so, tables had to be spaced a certain way, and the dining room had to be set up according to a pattern on the tile floor.

Clearly, Clifton loved order, but he loved people even more.

Clifton had a way with people, and people often commented how friendly he was. He was kind and compassionate. He was accommodating when possible, but firm when necessary.

He was no doormat, but neither was he overbearing. He was generous and very loyal; and if he became your friend, he was your friend for life.

And in all these ways, Clifton preached the gospel. He preached it not with words, but with the way he conducted himself. He did not need to give a message, because he was the message. And because he was interested in everyone, in people from every walk of life. And because he talked to everyone, he really did preach to gospel to all the world, just as Jesus instructed us to do.

On Wednesday, September 25th, Clifton passed from this life to the next, and his world became even bigger. Now, for Clifton, there is so much more of creation to interact. At the same time, our world became a little smaller, because our world no longer has Clifton in it.

But all around us are still the echoes of his beautiful spirit: we walk on the floors that he swept; we touch the walls that he cleaned; we turn the doorknobs that he wiped. But best of all, there is still the echo of the friendly smile and the kind attitude that Clifton extended so generously to all people.

Clifton was often the first person any visitor or guest would meet, and his welcoming attitude was gift to all those who stepped through the doors of St. Francis. The Faith Community of St. Francis, we could not have found a more perfect ambassador to serve as the face of St. Francis.

And for all of this, we give thanks today.

We give thanks that Clifton walked on this earth. We give thanks that he was our sexton, and our fellow church member, and our friend. We give thanks that we had the privilege to know him, to spend time with him, drink beer with him, to enjoy his company and to be cheered by his friendly nature.

And so today we say thank you. We say it with heavy hearts and with grieving hearts, but we say thank you nevertheless. Thank you, God, our creator, and author of life. Thank you God, for the life of Clifton.

Amen.