

Well, good morning.

It is a beautiful, beautiful day in southern California. I know from experience that you don't experience this very often, but I hope you enjoy it. My name is Katharine, Bishop Katharine, and I am assisting in San Diego until you elect your next diocesan bishop, and ordain that person, and the standing committee has decreed that that will happen, that ordination on the 15th of June in 2019. So I will be with you for the next year and a month or so. And I look forward to getting to know you better and visiting here again.

I've been frustrated recently by email that ends up in my spam folder. I keep trying to define a couple of regular correspondents as legitimate senders. And finally, in the last couple of days I found a place in the program where I can put them on the friend list, and I'm hoping that'll fix it.

I keep hearing about people who work hard at unfriending people on Facebook, usually because of the language they use or the attitudes they express. Who is a friend and who isn't? Can we tell by how they act? The wags say that a friend will tell you that there's spinach in your teeth, or that your fly is open. I've seen T-shirts that say, "Friends don't let friends drink Starbucks." But I keep on going. Because I think that conversation is much more likely to lead to transformation than boycotts or shunning, and that same principle for me, undergirds my attitude toward Israel and Palestine. We've got to stay engaged. The Ad Council brought us "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." If we care enough about our friends and about the destruction they might cause, we take their keys and hide them, or we drive them home, or we keep them close until they're sober again.

There are plenty of echoes of this kind of behavior in the Gospels. Jesus' friends can't stay awake the night that they're supposed to keep vigil with Him in the garden of Gethsemane. After Jesus is arrested, one of His best friends keeps saying, "Oh, I don't know Him," yet later there are tears of shame and sorrow. Other friends stand vigil with Him around the foot of the cross. Baptism is an acknowledgment that we are friends of Jesus, that

we know that God is hanging in there with us, whatever we do and wherever we are. Our baptismal vows are about trying to keep on doing the same thing and to treat the rest of the world as friends.

Jack's sponsors and all of these young people are going to promise to befriend each other and everyone else. And the rest of us are going to renew our own promises to do the same thing. It means being curious about others, building relationships, helping to create a world where every human being can grow and flourish in that kingdom of God that we pray for so fervently and frequently.

David Brooks had a column in The New York Times this week about a community in Italy that practices this kind of deep friendship. He has labeled it "The loving place for children that assumes beauty." 30 years ago, two families in the city of Como began to open their homes to children in crisis. One of the founders had met a priest who insisted that faith is a love story about encountering beauty. Faith is a love story about encountering beauty. And the founders first response was to foster a child, a small child, who was HIV positive.

Today this community, which is called Cometa, the comet, has built a network of foster families. They've built an after-school program. They've opened a vocational high school. They've developed a work cooperative for young people that teaches woodworking, and interior decorating, and hotel management. Their goal is to build relationships that give children the skills they need in life in ways that seek beauty in everything they do and in every person they interact with.

St. James knows a good deal about beauty. You're searching for it in all kinds of relationships. The art program of friend to friend and the Episcopal Community Services, linking with the children at Vida Joven in Tijuana, renewing relationships with St. Mark's and St. Luke's in inner city San Diego, and fostering, I hear this is beginning, fostering field work for young adults at UCSD. Beauty is a reflection of God in creation. It's part of what we insist about being made in the image of God. When

we see beauty, we're recognizing the hand of God at work in the world about us as that Eucharistic prayer says. God's awesome and beautiful creativity is reflected in every single human being, even when we find it hard to see. Parents and grandparents have no trouble seeing the beauty of a newborn child or their grandchildren. And I've got some pictures to show you!

How would the world be different if we could see and befriend the beauty all around us? I'm pretty sure that it has to begin with recognizing and affirming it within our own selves. We can't love our neighbors if we don't love ourselves. Jesus' baptism featured this great voice from heaven saying, "You are my beloved, and in you I am well pleased." We're seeing exactly the same thing when we're going to baptize Jack. God says to each one of us, "You are my beloved, and in you I am well pleased." But for most of us, life is a long struggle to really hear that and to remember. We are loved because we are, we're beautiful because that's how God made us, and nothing can undo that reality because God abides in us.

John's letter says that loving God and God's children is about obeying God's commandments. Most of us think that obeying means toeing the line and checking off the boxes on the to do list. But obedience means listening and then responding. That word comes from the same root as audience. What happens when you sit quietly and listen for God reminding you, "I love you. I abide in you. You are my pleasing and beautiful treasure."? Many of us find it hard to hold the balance. We get stuck in one direction or the other. "Oh, I'm the greatest," or, "No way, there is nothing good about me." Our tradition is often focused on the first one and called it the sin of pride, while the second one is about not having enough pride in the way God has made you, and not loving what God has given you.

What do you hear? Can you begin to hold those two things' in tension, beloved and well pleasing to God, when we can hear that divine echo about being loved and pleasing, befriending our neighbors becomes a real possibility. Your history tells a story about Virginia Scripps providing the space where this congregation began, and her

sister, Ellen, who befriended her neighbors when she gave the land and the funds and the bells in honor of her sister. She did something similar for girls in this community, down the road at the Bishop's school, which since then has expanded to include all sorts and conditions of beautiful youngsters.

This congregation is known for inviting the world to see and experience beauty in music and the arts, in bodies of all ages and capacities who's going to rise and shine, in this lovingly crafted liturgy, and in the life of the mind and the heart and the deed, in the kind of beauty we call justice. We are meant to be people of beautiful friendship, making more of it wherever we go. The Navajo have a word for this idea. It's hozho, hozho. It's often translated as beauty, but it's about right relationship and harmony in every relationship and with all parts of creation. It's very close kin to what Jesus means when He says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." This is how we love one another.

You may hear the echo of a Celtic blessing in this part of a Navajo prayer. "I walk with beauty before me. I walk with beauty behind me. I walk with beauty below me. I walk with beauty above me. I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful. And beauty all day long, may I walk."

May we walk in beauty as friends to all.