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## *Good News About Good People*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa  
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 8, Year A**

Given our proximity to July 4<sup>th</sup> and the celebrations already underway, my first preaching plan was to give a kind of Christian “State of the Union” address, with my brilliant reflections on the relationship between church and state, faith and politics. Which probably would send many of you packing! After all, we come to church looking for something different from politics as usual. We come looking for something that transcends the divisions of our time and the fear-and-anger-stoking news cycles that hold so many of us captive. We come here seeking good news!

So having moved on to Plan B, I hope you’ll unpack your things and settle back into your seat. And let me tell you a story.

It all started with another brilliant plan. Several weeks ago, I decided to address my household’s shortage of cars vis-à-vis drivers, and get exercise at the same time, by bringing a change of clothes to work and running home—by which I mean jogging. Slowly. It was a great idea, and a great run, until I tripped over something on the sidewalk along Piedmont Road and dove wrist-first onto the concrete.

I took one look at my wrist and knew I had a problem. A big problem. Then the pain came. It hurt so much, and I felt sick so sick, that I couldn’t move. That was another problem, because I was about a foot from the busy road.

Then, something amazing happened. A golden-gray SUV circled into the parking lot by me, and a woman about my age, climbed out, asked if I was ok, and if help was on the way.

As she fumbled with my cracked phone, another car pulled in—this one white, with two older women in the front, who called from the window to ask what they could do. I grunted my husband’s number; and while they were trying to reach him, a third car pulled in: an older car with character and Alabama plates and a young couple in front. A man with a beard and tattoos jumped out, surveyed the situation, and asked, “Could you use some water? Something cold?”

At my nod, he ran back to his car and pulled out a huge, unopened bottle of ice-cold lemonade. I took two big sips, and regretted wasting the rest of the bottle. But that was all I needed; I was ready, to move away from the road, with these strangers supporting me.

Then they all stayed there. They *had* been going somewhere; they had been on the road, after all. But they stopped, and stayed: four in their cars, and one—the first woman—squatting on the ground next to me. “I just don’t feel like I can leave you,” she said, as if asking permission. And we all waited quietly.

A few minutes later, my husband and daughter pulled up, got me into the car, waved thank you to these helpers, and drove me to the ER. I haven’t seen any of them since. I doubt I would recognize them if I did. And yet, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about them and their ordinary acts of kindness: a bottle of lemonade, a shoulder to lean on, a caring question, the willingness to help however they could, and the willingness to sit and do nothing but be there.

I’m *still* talking about them, because they had an extraordinary impact on me—and, I suspect, on anyone else who saw them. I needed their physical help and calm presence, of course. But I also needed the reminder that

people are kind. I needed the good news that there are good people doing good things, all the time. These, and the many other kindnesses that followed, made me want to run out and do likewise!

We hear so much bad, sad discouraging news—so much about what’s wrong in our world today, or in our communities or country or ourselves— that we might start to believe that this world is a bad place, that we are all bad people. That selfishness, deceit, meanness, or apathy is the primary or normal state of affairs.

But it’s not. It’s not! God created this world, and called it good. God created us—you and me, us and them— God created all of us, and called us *good*. That which is deepest, and truest, within us is *good*. Because it is of God.

Yes, we are capable of some pretty rotten things. But we are also capable of love and friendship, cooperation, generosity, sacrifice. And these good capacities run deep, deeper than the divisions or hot-button issues or bad behaviors of any time.

Yes, sin is real, and serious. And, yes, it has the power to suppress or distort the good within and among us. It has the power to separate us from God and others and our true selves.

But Christ has set us free from the power of sin. Christ has set free those deeper capacities in us. Christ has freed us to do the good that is in us, and to see the good in others. *Even when* no one else is looking. *Even when* we don’t get credit. *Even when* it’s not our job, or people don’t agree with us. That is freedom!

And with that freedom comes power: the power to impact, to influence, to inspire others. To transform our communities, our nation, our world, one cup of water at a time.

Which brings us back to faith and politics. (Maybe we’ve been there this whole time!) Politics isn’t just about public politicians and campaigns and Supreme Court decisions. It’s also how we live together, all of us, and care for one another. It’s about how we live into our shared values and identity, and how we seek the common good, starting right here.

And faith? Faith isn’t just about what you say or believe, intellectually. It is also how we act, and how we see— how we see people and the world around us. How we see Christ—the universal Christ—present and active, everywhere, in all people. And how we remember that they just might see Christ in us, too.

Sure, we could spend all day, every day, trying to get others to believe or think or act or vote like we do. Yelling—or posting—about what other people are doing wrong. Complaining about our leaders and institutions. Stewing over the frenzy of the day, as it unfolds on our phones or TVs, and waiting for the powers that be to do something about it.

Or we can accept the freedom we’ve been offered; we can pick up the power that is in our hands, and follow Christ. We can be kind. We can be trustworthy and trusting. We can see our neighbors, and be seen by them. We can care. We can be the community we long for.

And we can magnify the small acts of kindness and heroic sacrifices that are happening all the time, by looking for them, and talking about them—spreading good gossip, as Dean Candler says. And by saying thank you, whenever we can.

With that in mind, thank you. Thank you for the many, many ways you see, and care. Thank you for visiting the sick and the suffering and the isolated. Thank you for welcoming strangers, and sitting with the dying or grieving. Thank you for reaching out to those in need. Thank you for praying, together, for this church and this country and our leaders.

And thank you, Altar Guild, for this cup of water.