

## **Bishop Singh's Homily / Convention 151, Central New York**

### **Transcript:**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Good morning, saints!

Good morning, sinners!

Good morning, children of God.

It is such an honor to be here with you, and I'm so grateful to my friend and colleague, Bishop DeDe, for her generosity in inviting me to be with you. I happen to have the privilege of being a friend to her, and have learned and continue to learn so much from and through her. We are sending our prayers to you and your family, Bishop DeDe, during this time of grief and the embrace of resurrection in your family. Please accept our prayers with you.

I'm also honored to be here with so many of you, and I see some of the folks who have crossed boundaries to enrich the church in so many ways. I'm very grateful for the deep relationships that we have, and especially for Paul Frolick who helps us bridge that gap through the vehicle of the College for Congregational Development. We are grateful for your gift in participating in that, and for the partnerships that we are building, for the lessons we are learning through this amazing channel of grace. We are grateful to Canon Carrie [Schofield-Broadbent] who came and pitched it for you, Bishop, and she did a terrific job. She helped us remember who we are and who we are called to be. We're very, very grateful that you are able to come and help us keep this connection and the communion between our two neighboring dioceses.

Very honored to be here with Dr. Lisa Kimball and Dr. Daniela Flamenco as well. You are so blessed to have this opportunity on your 151st Convention, to actually inaugurate the new congregation, and to name it and to welcome it, to welcome the people to come as teachers to you, because they bring a worldview that is very different from ours, so to

speak. So, I hope and pray that this relationship will be one of learning and mutual benefit to the body of Christ so that we can all become better.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds us that we are constantly called to be grateful, and he, Silvanus, and Timothy are grateful for, especially the abundance of faith among the Thessalonians. As well as the increase of love for one another. Those are the two marks that Paul seems to identify in saying this is what we are grateful for. That is where the growth is. So, I might paraphrase that and say we are grateful for that evidence of God's presence in the abundance of faith that is growing among you, and for the love that you have for one another. That really is the mark of the church when it is at its best, isn't it? And so, we gathered today as you wrestle with your vision, your rule of life and your mission, and I love the fact that it's called a draft.

I think that's an important part of who we are. We are constantly emerging and responding to the spirit as the spirit gives us clarity. And in place, you have decided that your vision is a world healed by love. Now that is going to happen because you show up and do your part. Each of you. Each of us. No matter what order you're a part of, if you're a part of the 99% who call yourselves the lay saints, you are it. The rest of us are there just to sure, lead, and help remember who we are, tell the story. But the real work is getting done because those of you who call yourselves lay people are in the real world at this time.

So, I just want to remind you of a few things about this visioning thing. Habakkuk, the prophet reminds us that the vision does come. It might tarry a little, but every time we stop and wrestle, and are able to sit in those liminal spaces where we are not sure how to move, God does give us vision. And as long as you are curious, as long as you are willing to do the work, as long you are willing to be genuine, vision is there for the taking.

So, let me come to Zacchaeus, because Luke in this passage reminds us of some of the ways in which the way of love is engaged. Jesus, for instance, is on his way to Jerusalem. That's where he's headed, and he has a few disruptions. And one of them is the Zacchaeus story, where he stops in the name of love, and looks up at this

interesting character. “Zacchaeus come down, I’m actually going to stay in your house.” That’s a very curious way to connect, but Jesus demonstrates to us that it is possible for each of us to make a difference by moving from faith, to a loving feeling, to action.

We call it agency. Agency is when you say, “Here am I, Lord. Send me.” Not just send my sister, or send somebody else, but send me. Jesus demonstrates agency constantly as a mark of the Way of Love. He shows up, empties himself, and is present.

“Zacchaeus come down.” So, my friends, you, I, at the end of the day are called to be people who do something with what we know. Yes, there’s a time to wrestle, but then there’s a time to move into action, and that is the Way of Love.

We stand and breathe the air that Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, and so many others have breathed in this place. We are called like them to do our part, as people who respond to the call of Jesus, to the call of God, to restore all things, to be reconciled, to save those who are lost, and to seek them out. That is our way of responding to the Way of Love.

The second thing that I notice is that, we are called to a Way of Love that is curious. In Acts chapter 10, there’s a very interesting thing that happens in the early church. The early church was struggling with crossing thresholds of differences, and it was a primarily Jewish church at that time until Peter has this vision. And in that vision, he has a lot of animals coming down in this amazing platter called a cloth, and he is made to remember that he can eat everything. And he is arguing with God to say aren’t some things profane and some things pure or kosher? And the word of God comes to him very clearly to say what God has made clean, you must not make profane.

You cannot call unclean what God has cleaned, which is a very strange and important threshold that the church, the early church crossed. It led to, I believe, the revolution that is still unfolding, where we are curious about “the other.” Because as long as we are separated by purity and pollution, we will always be suspicious of the other, and there will always be the gradation that some are less than others. That vanishes in the early church, at least theologically.

Where the curiosity about the other started to get real, and the Way of Love is a way of curiosity. So, my friends, this is not easy. This is not easy. I guess that's why God called us, because we are crazy enough to think that in our time, we will do our part not only as agents of change, but as curious learners, developing a beginner's mind. Coming to that place as a child would, to say, "What can I learn from? What can I learn about the world through your eyes? What can you teach me about the Way of Love?"

So, my friends, we are invited into this sacred place. Where we will be curious, as a church. And the final thing I would remind us of is that God calls us to be genuine. Zacchaeus comes down from the tree, and everybody is murmuring, or most people are, "Oh, he's a sinner. He's a tax collector." All truth. And then Zacchaeus has this affirmation. I will give half of my belongings to the poor, and I will also repair repay four times, if I have defrauded anybody. That is more than a statement of faith. That is a genuine acknowledgement of wanting to set things right. Righteousness is really about setting relationships right, and Zacchaeus moves into that place of wanting to be genuine.

Howard Thurman has written a beautiful article, "Sound of the Genuine." If you get a chance, just Google that. It will help you to understand a little bit about the deep and abiding faith that God has in us to do our part, to be a part of the genuine. Can I have a glass of water. Thank you. Thank you. One speaker to the other. Thanks Lisa. I'm almost done.

But we do live in a very pretentious world. There is a lot of posturing, and ways in which we are not really modeling being who we are as genuine people who strive to come with our brokenness, with our foibles, and everything that is rich in each of us. And we all have all of that. There's a saint and a sinner in all of us, constantly struggling to grow more into one way or the other. And it is our responsibility to pay attention to that aspect of being genuine. And like Zacchaeus, to be able to clarify that we will back our words with our action.

So, one of my favorite stories is that of a fellow who has lost his job. And the only job he had was to impersonate the part of a monkey because the monkey in the zoo had died.

So very early in the morning, he needed to slip into a monkey suit in that zoo, and really just monkey around, and he was very good at this. He really enjoyed himself very much. There were a lot of children this particular day, and I guess the bananas got the better of him. He swung a little too much and fell into the lion's den. And in his horror, he was about to scream for help when the lion leaned over and said, "Shut up or we'll both lose our jobs."

How true that we spend so much of our energy trying to look like somebody else, or act like somebody else. And Jesus, the one who embodies the Way of Love, invites us to come as we are. To bring the genuine you are the best gift you can offer the world. And so, my beloved, on your 151st Convention, I hope you can take that sense of freedom and liberation and live into your agency more fully. Become a little more curious about being humble and learning from the other, and then let the light of Christ shine through your genuine self. May this be so in our time, in your life, in the life of your congregation, and the world around us. Amen.

Amen.