

The Rev. Dr. John Gillison Speaks at St. Michael's

By Peg Eastman

On Sunday, August 2, St. Michael's was privileged to have the Rev. Dr. John Gillison give the 10:30 service sermon, "The Perfect Model for All Times." Now retired after fifty-six years of active ministry, he was Senior pastor of Mother Emmanuel Church for eight of those years. Over 360 people packed the church to hear him speak.

Opening with a prayer, the Rev. Gillison introduced his topic with a familiar passage from Philippians 2:5 "let this mind be in you that is also in Christ Jesus." This mindset is the perfect model for today's world and for all times. Jesus came with humility, something which decreases selfishness and increases humanity. Yet Jesus never gave up his equality with God when he took on the imprisonment of the "flesh" to help a suffering world.

He stressed that Christians must give up their comfort zones. Examples were a reluctant Moses, who liberated his people and Martin Luther King, who responded to the cries of his people.

"Father forgive them for they know not what they do" were Jesus' immortal words when he hung suffering on the cross. And forgiveness, love and a hope of salvation were what the bereaved families at Mother Emmanuel offered to the murderer of their loved ones in an act that confounded and inspired not only Charleston, but the entire world. Their forgiveness was a powerful sermon, for they wanted to be like Jesus in their hearts. He went on to say that he was thankful for the great outpouring of love to the bereaved families and Mother Emmanuel Church and thanked St. Michael's Church for its support.

The Rev. Gillison stressed that as Christians, we can know "hope in piles of ashes," and asked this timeless question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In spite of bad things, we must have love in our hearts and be able to offer forgiveness. He

stressed that we will never attain perfection, and that all of us are constantly "becoming Christians."

The Rev. Gillison's gentle and gracious demeanor greatly impressed the congregation, and the sermon ended with a resounding standing ovation.

The Rev. Zadig concluded the service by commenting that we need a "teacher" and asked the Rev. Gillison to be our teacher in a longstanding relationship in power of the Holy Spirit. He stressed that the morning service was intended to plant the seeds for the future. The congregation was invited to a question and answer session after a break for refreshments.

Special guests included the Rev. Tim Keller, as well as the Rev. Gillison's cousins and their spouses: Gwen and Nelson Bevo, Stanley and Alma Gadson, Beverly Gadson, and Ethel Greene. Other visitors were Jerome McGill and his wife Rosalind, who accompanied Allston Kitchens on a trip to Burundi in 2013, and their children.

The Rev. Zadig moderated the Q&A Session. Some of the topics addressed were: What does it look like to truly forgive, what it was like for the Rev. Gillison to forgive, and what do you think Jesus would say after the tragedy at Mother Emmanuel Church? The Rev. Gillison stressed that the white and the black communities need to know each other better, and he challenged the white churches to study black history and the contributions they have made. To heal the divide between the races, he suggested teaching children love and brotherhood instead of depersonalizing blacks, avoiding

generalizations and the "spirit of paternalism, practicing what we preach and to keep on praying. He stressed that "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform."

When asked what we should pray for, he asked the congregation to pray for Bishop Richard Morris's health and that he will appoint the right pastor for Mother Emmanuel.

The Rev. Zadig introduced the Galatians Task Force which has been seeking a path forward using Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." NIV Those Task Force members present were introduced.

Jane Waring, a member of St. Michael's for fifty-four years, closed the session by commenting how proud she was of the "Christ-like way the ladies from Mother Emmanuel spoke to the murderer in the Courtroom Hearing. They lived the Gospel, and their actions prevented another Baltimore riot."

Susan Gaddy summed up the morning perfectly. "It was the best service I ever attended."



Letter to the Rector

Please forgive my not writing you earlier to say how much I appreciated our homily on Carolina Day. It spoke to the day so perfectly on multiple levels. In fact, when I left St. Michael's on my way to the Society of the Cincinnati meeting at the Yacht Club, I saw the sign on Meeting Street that read, "We Stand with Emanuel A.M.E. We are all one in Christ." It seemed to fit directly with your wonderful remarks.

By the way, have you ever read Led On!, Toomer Porter's memoirs? It is a powerful read. When I started it, I could not put it down. I promise that you will be glad you got a copy once you start reading it. One particularly powerful section deals with a sermon Toomer Porter gave at St. Michael's. As my friend who is now rector of St. James in Florence says, "That'll preach." And I promise you will get a lot of sermons out of Porter's memoirs. He was quite a man and quite a Christian.

Regards, Palmer