**17 Pentecost**

**September 20, 2015**

**Jazz Vespers**

**The Feast of Cyprian of Carthage**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit.**

**Amen.**

Good afternoon! This evening we are celebrating the return of our Jazz Vespers service after a summer sabbatical with the music of the Marc Dickman Jazz Quartet, and we are remembering the patron saint of this church, Cyprian of Carthage.

This congregation is the namesake of Cyprian, a third century bishop in Carthage, a North African city in what is now Tunisia. There are 12 Episcopal Churches in the United States that are named St. Cyprian’s. The main reason for naming a church after Cyprian of Carthage is that it is assumed that he was a person of color, and all of these congregations were originally formed as churches for African Americans. The feast day of Cyprian of Carthage in the Church’s calendar is September 14 … this past Monday … thus the occasion for remembering Cyprian this evening. An interesting sidebar is that the Rev. P. W. Cassey, who is memorialized on the brass plaque near the door to the church, and who served this congregation in its early years, was affiliated with three of those twelve congregations named St. Cyprian’s.

However, Cyprian of Carthage, this third century bishop, was known for something other than just the color of his skin. In the third century the Church was still in its formative stage, and in many places it was in conflict with the powers of the Holy Roman Empire. Carthage, just across the Mediterranean Sea from Sicily and Italy was one of those places. The new Christian faith was converting thousands of people, yet it was not without a cost. Depending upon the local governor, or the orders from Rome, the newly converted Christian would face persecution. The Roman Empire wanted its subjects to sacrifice to the Roman gods … or be killed. Thus, under the pressure of Rome and the persecutions many Christians recanted their newly found faith and then, when the pressure was off they would come back seeking a home again in the Church. Some bishops welcomed back into the fold these people who recanted, but others felt they had committed an unforgivable sin and so they were refused re-entry were excommunicated. Cyprian, our hero and namesake, championed the cause to allow the outcasts back into the community of faithful. It seems to me, almost 1,800 years later, that Cyprian’s legacy is about inclusion, not just the color of his skin. Cyprian was martyred in 258 when he would not sacrifice to the Roman gods, and was beheaded.

This St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church … on this corner in the historic Lincolnville neighborhood of St. Augustine for 115 years … today in 2015 stands for that radical inclusion of all of God’s children, regardless of why they may have been estranged from the Church. We welcome those who have been marginalized in our society, and disenfranchised from their community of faith. That is the legacy that we have inherited from Cyprian of Carthage … and the legacy we offer this generation of those on their spiritual journey. St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church has been a cornerstone in this historic neighborhood of Lincolnville for 115 years … and it will continue to be so in the future. And the legacy of our namesake, Cyprian of Carthage … a legacy of radical inclusion … will be our hallmark.

Amen.