

The Rev. Michele H. Morgan
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Year A
July 20, 2008

This is from my friend Wendy Porter's blog:

"My group's Google map led us to a public park overlooking the Mississippi sound, and the instructions on our post-it note simply said, "Weed."

Since Katrina, public recreation spaces have been largely ignored. City employees have been needed elsewhere; cutting the grass has not been a priority. The memorial park in Pass Christian (which is along the Mississippi sound and about an hour east of New Orleans) was overgrown completely. We had our work cut out for us.

Not to mention that we had 27 pissed-off teenagers on our hands. They wanted to work on houses and deal with people. They wanted to handle power tools and paint brushes. Yardwork was NOT their idea of CHANGING, LIKE, THE WORLD. There was a crap-storm of crapp-itudes at the park that first day: "No one cares about this effin place." "This blow, Wendy." "Why did we even bother getting the up?" "I hate this hole."

But us old people were actually kinda happy right from the start. We overlooked water and there was a breeze cutting through the million-degree weather. All of us knew how to dig or pretend to dig, so we did. We got our knees dirty and started pulling up this awful torpedo grass stuff that has roots, long and white, that are strong as hell. This stuff could pierce its way through tarps and rubber and maybe my hand if I held it to the ground long enough. Mutant coastal weed.

Hour after hour, we sat and pulled and pulled. Over time, our work shifted from weeds to grass to edging. We cleaned up the playground, the gazebo, and the sandbox. And this weird thing happened—as we cleaned, people showed up. Literally, as the three of us in the sandbox dusted off our butts and took up our garbage sacks, four children made running leaps into the sand. The goodness was tangible.

I spent a lot of time walking the park, checking on the clusters of young people working to make things bright and beautiful. At some point, the collective attitude took a turn for the better. The complaining was replaced with giggling and matchmaking and macho-talk and gossip. Among the weeds, relationships formed between them. And, eventually, they each had a relationship to the park. They learned to love it, and in return, the park looked loved. When it was all said and done, I actually thought they'd be sad to leave it, but they weren't: "It's not ours," said one formerly aloof punk, "it's theirs." I love it when teenagers shut up and get it."¹

So maybe all of our inability to "get it" is why the writer of the gospel felt a need to let us know in *Great Detail* of what Jesus was telling us in the gospel. It just seems totally un-like Jesus to help us get IT at such a depth. The truth of the matter is that when Jesus tells us a story, we are expected to make meaning of it in our own lives. That is why the parables of the Bible still speak to us today. We do not get to make whole cloth from them but we do have the ability to pour our lives through those stories and in doing

¹ <http://iareawriter.blogspot.com/> Used with permission and the language was cleaned up by me.

that then we are able to make some meaning of our lives and the life that God is calling to us.

It is the reading and being a part of scripture that has given meaning to some of the big chunks of my life. I feel that I know who I am before God not because I am a weed or a shaft of wheat. I know that I am always being called and I am here with intellect and the ability to pick my way forward to God, even when it seems that I am more like teenagers weeding in a park and being ticked off about it. I have said it before, I would rather be the one who understands it all, (and all of the time) and able to say with great clarity, "I am Michele. I am a Christian. I am a child of God, a member of God's household. This is my true identity, and all the other roles that I have grown out of my Christianity, those other roles are informed by God, and strengthened by Christ. The Rev. Jennifer Deaton says this, "Being a child of God is not a role we play. It is who we most truly are. I know you, God says to each one of us, mother or father, daughter or son, rich or poor, old or young,² (farmer, weeder, pissed-off teenager or youth minister making the best of a situation). I know you. I hear you. I see you. I will not abandon you in the wilderness. Do not be afraid." I always want that kind of clarity and the only way that I know how to get it is to work at it.

(9am ONLY) In a section of Romans that is part of the lectionary that we did not hear is this..... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

St. Paul is telling us that God has adopted us and loves us as we are and that is enough for God. I wish it would be enough for humans. As we are taken in, as we join the Christian community, we need, for our humanness, to find a place here. We need a sense of place and of knowledge of where we fit in. God adopted me but I was born into a human family and I am clear about where my place is in that family. I am the seventh child, I have three older sisters and three older brothers, I am a sister, I am an aunt, a great aunt, a daughter, a cousin, a second cousin, a niece, a sister-in-law and for some of my family I will always be a fourteen-year-old who does not have a clue. I hope and wait for a change, knowing that I am loved but not holding my breath that I will be fully seen.

I have a different expectation in my Christian community, my adopted Christian Family. I expect that absolutely everything can and will change for us as a community, as a church, as a communion. I know with great certainty that I am part of this and that I am seen and that I am loved in this place and in the church. I am part of a greater church that is changing and I see it as a change for hope and love and everything that God wishes for us when we first were adopted.

One of my favorite movies in the world is *The Shawshank Redemption*. It is the story of a man named Andy who is sent to prison for a crime you are not sure he has committed. In this incredibly violent place he walks, is attacked, and yet he does not let it get to him. His best friend in prison is an institutionalized con named Red. Red and Andy spend 20 plus years in prison together. At one point, Andy and Red get into a

² Sermon by Jennifer

fight. When Andy asks Red about music, Red answers, "I played the harmonica as a younger man. Lost interest in it though. Didn't make much sense in here."

Andy replies, "Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so you don't forget."

Red: "Forget?"

Andy: "Yeah, forget that there are places in the world that aren't made cut of stone. That there's something inside that they can't get to, that they can't touch. It's yours."

Red: "What are you talking about?"

Andy: "Hope."

Red: "Hope? Let me tell you something, my friend, hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane. It's got no use on the inside. You better get used to that idea."

Red and the rest of the convicts have lost all hope, sitting in that horrible violent place. It is gone and the worse part is that they do not even want to look for it. It is a journey that would be so painful the very thought of it is too much. The very thought of hope is too much. This is what the separation from God feels like, they have no way of moving through the world other than putting one foot in front of the other. That is why Paul's words in Romans are so powerful, "*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*" Hope is something that Andy has and sees and knows that he must share.

That is the hope that we are called to share. We are called to move into this community and hope. We are called into the greater community and hope. God has adopted us and we do not have to just be better at what we already know and do, we are called to work, whether that is weeding, making community or bring forth the best of others or ourselves. We expect and hope something that we have not realized and have not seen. That is what those teenagers in Mississippi experienced and it is what God hopes for us.

That kind of hope is transformative. In the end of the movie Red, the institutional man, (who just wants to die because he is outside and does not know what to do and is afraid all the time) has jumped his parole and is on a bus heading to find his friend. And this is what he says, "I find I'm so excited, I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it's the excitement only a free man can feel, a free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend, and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.

AMEN