

Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 6, 2010

Today we begin the time between the cycles of Lent/Easter/Pentecost and Advent/Christmas/Epiphany. All of the Sundays from now until Advent are known as Sundays after Pentecost. Last week we observed Trinity Sunday, also known as the first Sunday after Pentecost. This week and the weeks ahead until Advent are known as Ordinary Time. At the top of your new bulletins call it the season after Pentecost, but it really is not a season. I just was not comfortable with the words Ordinary Time.

I have been reminded that for the most part, our lives ARE lived in ordinary time. However, it is not to say that the time we live in today is not just as special as we observe baptisms, confirmations, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, and birthdays during "ordinary" time. Indeed, all time for me is an extraordinary gift from God. Whatever the challenges before us, life itself is a precious gift offered by Love for love.

As we look at the events in the readings for today, they are extraordinary in some ways, food in time of famine, resurrection, conversion from persecutor of Christ to apostle. Yet they are also ordinary in many ways. Look at the hungry that are fed here every Friday, folks who know famine in a land of plenty. Pain and death are a part of life in this community. Yet funerals are also celebrations of life, just as we celebrated the life of Thomas Hindman recently and will do the same shortly for June Rowe. We see violence driven by religion even within humanitarian efforts as the attack on and from the flotilla headed for Gaza and the persecution of gays and lesbians in parts of the Anglican Communion illustrates. We have those in our own congregation, both small children and adults also waging battles with cancer and other diseases.

David Lose says: *No wonder we love feasts and festivals – they break not just the monotony but the relentless, even merciless inevitability of the ordinary. As poet W. H. Auden laments, "the Time Being" – the ordinary time between festivals – is "the most trying time of all."*

Which is just what makes these stories so important. The God of Elijah, Paul, and Jesus will not abandon us to the ordinary. Because we are so accustomed, even resigned, to the ordinary, God's intervention will not always at first be welcome. Consider again the scene with Jesus, of just how intrusive and insensitive he must have seemed to those caught up in their rituals of grief as he breaks into their funeral procession and orders the bereaved mother, "Do not weep." Yet Luke tells us that he is moved by compassion – a chief attribute of Jesus in Luke – and so will not leave well enough alone but intrudes in order to combat death with life and mourning with joy.

So it always is. It may be hard to detect at times, but God is amongst us, breaking into the ordinary, the mundane, the Time Being, in order to encourage, support, restore, and eventually to redeem. We will not always welcome the promise of life, either because we have grown accustomed to death or simply fear having our hopes disappointed one more time. But deep down, underneath the numbness and fear, there is nothing we need and want to hear more.

Last week, on Trinity Sunday we wrestled with a God that is so big and mysterious that we have great difficulty comprehending anything about who God is. And that is troubling to the soul. But in these readings we wrestle with the closeness of God. We have a God who touches us - solemnly, profoundly, and with purpose. And, isn't that just as troubling?

Rick Morley says: *Isn't it so much more desirable to have a God who is at arm's length? Maybe not a universe away separated from us by incomprehension, but certainly not a God intimately reaches out his hand and places it upon us.*

We don't do that.

As Luke crafts the gospel story, Morley reminds us: *(Luke) saturates it in death. There's a woman who's a widow. She now a grieving mother. The corpse of her son is there. It's a funeral procession.*

This story has been dipped and coated in death. It wrecks of decay, despair, and grief.

And the one who is dead, is us. And Jesus, reaches out his hand and touches us. And he tells us to get up.

And do we? Do we even know we're dead? Do we even know that there's a lifeline? Do we even know that there's a life that's so much better, if only we get up as Jesus asks us to?

We get so comfortable in life that we think that everything is just normal - that all is ok.

We're "fine." We're "good."

We can even get comfortable in church-life, shuffling along making our way to our pew. Sitting attentively. Behaving. Going up for Communion when it's time, and dropping our money in the plate when the nice man comes by.

We're "fine." We're "good."

But, no we're not.

We're either dead, or we're being birthed by God. And, when you put it like that, touching is just fine. Bring it on.

Bring those calloused hands on, and stop the parade.

This is big. And we have no idea.