

Easter III Year B 2015

Irene Raymond, former babysitter and sexton of All Saints, died this past Sunday... Her funeral was at the Emmanuel Seventh Day Adventist Church in Pritchard... some of us from All Saints were there....Like most African American churches there was a lot of, shall we say, audience participation... a lot of Amens amid outstretched hands in praise... and music, Oh the music... The soloist while tuning up, without missing a beat crooned "a little more volume!" Irene's family sat on the front row... visibly heart-broken... Irene was the matriarch of a large extended family... all of whom were free to share their profound grief with the gathering there on MLK avenue... selected members of the church served as attendants to tend to the bereaved... to bodily offer their support... hands of comfort... hands of solidarity... During the service, as noon approached and the rain fell hard... back at All Saints... the bell was tolled... seventy six times... seventy six times for the number of years Irene lived on earth... the same bell Irene tolled for many of our own upon their deaths over the many years she was here.

The poet Dante knew centuries ago, as indeed modern physics suggests, that the most rudimentary element of the universe is tonality... music, for lack of a better word... that underneath all matter and energy, beneath quarks and quanta and strings is a song... harmonic vibrations from the dawn of time... an improvisational order, as it were, an aesthetic tap root... singing creation into being... the sonorous voice of the bell an outward an visible sign... awakening in the depths of our souls the recognition... the *recognition* that all manner of thing shall be well. That when all is said and done... when all illusions have been vanquished... there is only the song... and the song is a song of praise.

Our story in Luke this morning is a story of recognition... recognition: thinking again, knowing again.... The story we just read immediately follows the story of the disciples walking to Emmaus during which Jesus appears along the road with them...In both of these, the two resurrection accounts in Luke, the disciples at first do not recognize Jesus... it is not until they see Jesus' wounds that they recognize him... and both appearances are in the context of a meal, the consummate representation of community... In the Emmaus story Jesus breaks bread and in so doing he shows his wounded hands... In our reading today, he explicitly shows his wounds and then asks for something to eat... It is then that the disciples know it is the risen Christ, and such knowledge we are told by the narrator opens their minds... the scriptures make sense to them as if for the first

time... and they are empowered and sent out with renewed vision, renewed hope...

This in short is Luke's account of the birth of the church... the birth of the church in the context of profound grief... the birth of the church in the face of brutality and shame and fear.... If nothing else the cross is a symbol of the wound of the world, the suffering and grief of existence... from which hope and nurture and life come... It is in truth the great paradox of this life... the yin and yang of existence... the great mystery that our life is renewed time and again from our wounds.... And, to be sure, that is the action of community. I don't know what it is in the African American community... and I don't want to romanticize their suffering... but they are in touch with a richness of life, their corporate suffering notwithstanding, that welcomes and includes, and soothes... and finds meaning and perspective... and leads to praise.

The hands that attended to Irene's family were I am sure, wounded hands... not just because African American people have suffered injustice and discrimination, and shame... but simply because they are human... human hands just like the hands of all of us.... The hands that toll this bell and every bell are wounded hands. The hands this morning, wounded... In both Luke and John the risen Jesus is visibly wounded.... His body is not airbrushed... but damaged.... A body having suffered... but a body alive, and full of hope, luminous with the love that creates all things.... And this risen Jesus is of course the church... all of us... the human community... a people risen for the work of love despite our wounded hands and feet.

This, brothers and sisters, is testimony that it is our very vulnerability that is at the heart of our humanity... and that that vulnerability is the divine part of us... God loves the world in utter vulnerability... not in triumph, but vulnerability... It is through owning our wounds... dealing with them creatively, ascribing meaning to our suffering... that we are healed and that we are empowered to heal others... Resurrection life is not a ghostly magic trick... but a way of life lived for others... bearing our wounds in solidarity with the wounds of others.

So know this in this great season of Easter... If you want to see Christ risen in the world around you... look at the wounded of our world... love the broken hearted.... break bread with them... be healers of the wound, tend bodily to the wounded, and you'll find peace, and enlightened awareness... that things make good sense... you'll see that the song is forever worth singing... "a little volume, please" ... that life is irrepressible... and you'll know that the only thing there is... is praise.