

## Easter VII Year B 2015

This past Thursday I had the honor of attending the investiture of Henry Callaway as Federal District bankruptcy judge. The Ceremony took place at the Federal Courthouse downtown. The courtroom was packed with family and business associates and friends and well-wishers.... And lawyers... they all look alike. The ceremony was solemn and moving.... Beautiful, really. It began with a procession of some two dozen Judges, both state and federal.... The oath of office in which Henry swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States was administered by the presiding judge of our federal district. There were three speakers, the presidents of the local and state bar associations, and a local circuit judge. They all spoke of the high calling that it is to be a judge.... The honorableness of the office... the high calling to be a steward of justice... It made me proud, almost to tears, to be a citizen in a country that upholds as an ideal the rule of law... that upholds justice, and equality and fairness... I thought of our roots as a society... the adoption of the bill of rights... Its ancestor, the Magna Carta... and the birth of democracy among the Greek city states.... The common thread of our civilization as to how we live together being justice and equality... fairness and dignity. The ceremony was an outward and visible sign of such a venerable tradition.... It was liturgy, I thought... liturgy pure and simple...naming what is good and true about humanity... Out loud.

It was an outward and visible sign of our highest hopes for our society... the human community... people called upon to enact the means of God's love in the world... which according to Rhienhold Neihbur is justice.... The ceremony, as all good liturgy does, pointed beyond the particular occasion. It was not just about Henry... It was about the highest hopes of our humanity.... Henry in fact had already been sworn in because he's already started to work... but the ceremony, the liturgy was necessary nonetheless... because we humans need to see to believe... we need to act out, as it were, in dramatic fashion, outwardly and visibly, the great aspirations of our species... to speak of our true identity... to name out loud what we are called to be... setting the bar, as it were.

Henry and I talked about the ceremony... and he agreed that it was liturgy... he called it a secular liturgy... but I don't believe God differentiates between the sacred and the secular... anything that is true is sacred... and therefore the world is sacred, the human enterprise is sacred.... The experience Thursday gave me some insight into why we gather here at All Saints... Why it is not just a social occasion or something we do because we are supposed to... we gather because

we have the need to speak out loud of what it means to be human in relationship to God... we speak here of our highest aspirations... we speak of our identity... and we speak of what it is to which we are called... what it is that is our purpose... we speak of our reason for living, in short... If you, like me, are moved from time to time in our liturgy, it is because we are dealing with matters that speak incisively of our true humanity... It is intimate knowledge... knowledge borne by beauty and mystery... knowledge for which we are trusted stewards... knowledge that informs and transforms... knowledge that engenders a way of life that is true to our birthright... true to the way God intends us to be.... To encounter such honesty moves us... as well it should.

We just read from the Gospel of John the passage that is considered Jesus' prayer for the church... whether Jesus actually prayed the prayer or not, it doesn't matter... It is the community of faith's prayer for itself and for the tradition in which they are a part, and the tradition that is their legacy.... And it is also a treatise at the heart of John's theology as to the identity of the people of faith... John takes great pains to insist that the incarnation is as much about the gathered faithful as it is about Jesus... God is in Jesus and Jesus in God ... and Jesus in the ones who follow... a collaborative intimacy.... and the heart of the matter, to cut to the chase... the heart of our identity, at least according to John... is that we are sent as Jesus is sent... Our identity is not about our being fallen in the need of being saved... that's easy... western Christianity has made a living on that theology for centuries.... But it ain't selling any more, at least according to the most recent Pew research poll on organized religion in America... the poll found that the "nones" (people who don't ascribe to any faith tradition) are gaining ground exponentially, while people who call themselves Christian are decreasing at the same rapid rate... No, our identity is not about a sinful folk in need of rescuing from the fires of hell... This gospel tells us we are made in the image of God... to do what God does in the world... to live as God lives.... lives of sacrifice for our brother, our sister... to practice the art of befriending the stranger, the outcast, the disenfranchised, the lost and the least among us... to bring dignity and empowerment to the beaten down... to challenge the oppressive structures of our world that abase and demean.... To act for revolutionary change against the evil in our world... That is what Jesus was sent to do... and therefore brothers and sisters, that is our call.... No less than Jesus himself... As he is savior, then so too are we savior... sent to give our body and blood as living nurture.... That is why we gather Sunday after Sunday... to speak of such foolishness... foolishness that is the

wisdom of God... to speak in dramatic fashion of our highest aspirations... our true identity... our true calling.

Dear friends of God, we are not here on this earth to get it right... we are not here to be successful... we are not here to win the day... we are here on this earth to be true... true to our calling... true to our humanity... true to our God... and what a noble vocation that is.

And we gather here for another reason... another most important reason... and that is to praise... This call into our deepest selves... this call to recognize the gift that it is to be human... to recognize that we are loved by God unconditionally... to recognize that love will stand against any enemy... real or imagined... and to bear such knowledge to the world... This is a call into our highest aspirations... a call into the heart of our humanity... And such a call requires celebration... for decorum, for ceremony, for procession, for music... for a banquet... there is no celebration more germane... no celebration more meet, more right. We this day have the opportunity to name such a call... to name such a life out loud, lest we forget ourselves... and in so naming... perhaps by the grace of God we may live this life every day in radical honesty.... We may live Out loud.

There is all kinds of energy among the vestry these days to name and communicate who we are as the community gathered at All Saints, so that the life here may be sustained for generations to come.... The old is passing away... and the new unfolds... as it has ever been... the work... the work of life, the work of faith is to be true to ourselves... true to our call... Jesus prays that his apostles... his sent ones be sanctified in the truth... that should be our prayer each and every day... let us be sanctified in the truth.... And let us believe it and let us be the truth in the world... out loud.