

Epiphany I Year C

The heaven was opened and a voice came from heaven...

Back when I was in the insurance business several of the insurance companies I represented would from year to year invite Katharine and me and other so-called high performing agents and their spouses to a week-long trip to some exotic destination. The purpose of course was to woo us into producing more business for them. Katharine and I would invariably sneak away from the business sessions and do other things like visiting museums, or gardens...I can admit that now that I'm not in the business. Once we were in London, and we had sneaked away from the convention and were visiting Westminster Abbey. Some of you have been there: the marvelous stone tiles on the floor, the soaring gothic arches and windows....there's poet's corner where some of the greatest literary artists of England are interred: Eliot, Hardy, Wilde, Herbert...the tomb of Elizabeth the first, she who calmed a troubled nation, defeated the Spanish Armada, and cast the mold for the church which would become the via media, the Anglican way, striking a balance between protestant sensibilities and those catholic. We were checking out of the crowded gift shop located in the undercroft, and we were standing behind this quintessential elderly British couple in line. He naturally had on a tweed coat and dark flannel pants and a bow tie; she was wearing a smart flannel suit with an elegant brooch on her lapel. The Church of England had just voted to allow women to be priests, and I decided to ask this couple what they thought about it....I said excuse me...we are from Alabama and are members of the Episcopal Church...the gentleman interrupted me and said, looking at his wife.... "oh, don't you just love his accent" they're from the south! He exclaimed... I blushed and pressed on. I asked them what they thought of women now being allowed into the priesthood. The lady who had a benign but resolute expression on her face stood to her full height, and in an unequivocal, clear voice said, "for the first time in my life I feel like I am a daughter of God." And a voice from heaven said, this is my daughter with whom I am well pleased.

That is who we are, brothers and sisters, as the baptized, we are sons and daughters of God. At every baptism, a voice, the voice from heaven declares...this is my son...this is my daughter. At our granddaughter's baptism a couple of months ago, I thought almost aloud....my gosh, what are we getting her in to; because as sons and daughters of God we are therefore heirs of a way of life...to be God's sons and daughters we have the responsibility to live lives of love which will indeed transform our world...

Water the symbol of our lives as sons and daughters...water can be deadly and water can be life giving....so this life, this path that we are set on is fraught with ambiguity and peril, and it will require our all, our rapt attention, and our acting for the good when we see it; but we also recognize that we live this life in gathered community...we have each other to lean upon in our living lives of love. In our baptisms we are drowned, dead to sin, which doesn't just mean our own individual sins...but moreover we are dead to the sinful structures of the world which would oppress and abase...but through the waters of baptism we are given new life and hope, we are filled with expectation of a world made new, a world set right as God would have it; and in living out our baptismal lives we are empowered and emboldened to act for the good, filled, as Luke puts it, with Spirit and fire. In living into our baptisms, we live into our second life...there is a time in human development when we must of necessity live for ourselves (I'm thinking of our granddaughter who is absolutely certain that she is the center of the universe), but then comes the time we are initiated into our second life in which we live for the other....this ambiguous way of life is ironically the way to true joy.

I occasionally read *The Onion*, which is a hilarious, I think, satirical magazine posing as a news journal. Recently I saw an ad in the margin (this was on-line) the ad was an ad for a tee shirt that said, "I used to care, but I take a pill for that now." Funny, but kind of scary too. Quite simply to live a baptismal life is to live a life of caring...loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. It is an ethic to which the whole of scripture calls us....a call to care....a call to care for each other... a call to care about our world being just, to care about peace, to care about the sick and suffering, to care about the dignity of our neighbor....to care, and act.

My hope for Elliott, our granddaughter, she now a daughter of God, is that she will grow in grace and wisdom and know to her bones that her life is meant for the good of her world...may she resist the temptation, that tempts us all, that we live for ourselves alone. That she may find a community of other sons and daughters of faith, others who know the call; that she may know that she is not the center of the universe, but that the love of God is. May she stand tall and proudly proclaim that she is a daughter of God and be the world changer she was born to be...and may we, also sons and daughters of God...may we also stand tall and own our true kinship, own our legacy of why we are here....And may the heaven open, and may the selfsame voice from heaven proclaim for us and for generation to generation....you are my beloved sons and daughters, and with you I am well pleased.