

Lent III Year B 2015

Today is a reality check.... In truth, that is the chief reason we gather here Sunday after Sunday.... A reality check... We gather amid beautiful music.... We listen to mythology and parable and instruction and rhetoric meant to persuade us... We read all this from what we deem sacred texts.... We listen to preaching, and we say prayers together, and on occasion we confess our falling short and our acquiescing to the evil that pervades our world.... And then we share a ritualistic common meal, a symbol of the nurture manifest within the gathered community... nurture to re-enter our world reminded who we are and to whom we belong... a reality check.... Because it is a trait of the human condition that we need reminding.... We need reminding lest we forget why we are here.... We need reminding lest we forget for what purpose we live.

There is a fancy seminary word, a theological term referring to the purpose of the Eucharist... those of you EFM graduates might remember it... the word is Anamnesis... a Greek word that means remembering, or recollection....our English word amnesia is its opposite (you know, the epidemic in soap operas) Anamnesis is what Jesus instructed us to do concerning the family meal... "Do this in remembrance of me," he says... In this meal we remember, we recall Jesus' life of sacrifice... his life given for the good of the world... living for a cause even unto death....and more importantly that this life is lived in a community of love and support and nurture and solidarity... hence the symbol of a meal... a meal being essential to life itself, and a meal being one of the most intimate human experiences on earth.... At the Eucharist we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples in which Jesus likens the meal in the upper room to the sharing of his own body and blood... That the nurture of the community is contingent upon sacrifice.... Body and blood the mysterious and dangerous metaphor.... We remember Sunday after Sunday that Jesus gave the whole of himself, his body and blood, for the vision that God has for the world.... that challenging the evils of our world, daring to live as one inclusive community sharing the abundance of God, respecting the dignity of every human being...standing against evil; being about the business of restoring our world... is worth dying for. That such sacrifice is vital nurture for our world. That is what we gather to remember Sunday after Sunday.... That is what we remind ourselves that reality looks like

But dear sisters and brothers... do not make the grave mistake... that the mysterious and dangerous body and blood on that altar is just the body and blood of Jesus.... Make no mistake that that body and blood, that life and labor, that sacrifice is us.... On this Holy table we celebrate the incarnational reality that we

are, no less than Jesus of Nazareth... that we are taken, blessed, broken and given for the nurture and restoration of our world... that we are a living sacrifice given for all.... The story of Jesus' life and ministry... his death and resurrection is not just a quaint legend from the days of yore.... His story is our story, as true today as ever.... That our sacrifice for our brother, our sacrifice for our sister is what brings new life and hope and dignity and self-respect and empowered well-being and joy... resurrection in short.... That is the way it is, reality, in God's alchemical economy... That is why we live... that is why we are here... We live as a "ransom for many" We take on the sins of the world... that is reality, a present reality.

So that brings us to what we remember this day.... We remember those fifty years ago in Selma Alabama, a particular moment in history... we remember those who caught sight of God's vision for the world... and offered their bodies and blood for its sake.... Those who offered themselves to be blessed broken and given to a world racked by evil... they offered themselves for the good of not just themselves but for the good of the whole... The time was ripe... history was ready for a turn, and they offered themselves, their bodies and blood, to the mysterious and dangerous call of God... and that sacrifice still ramifies.... That sacrifice still rings of freedom and dignity; because the Spirit rings of freedom and dignity.

The call of the gospel seems simple to me today. The call of the gospel is that we make history; that through our words and actions we are to turn history itself towards the good and the true; history of course still in its becoming, rife, still, with infinite possibility.... This gospel call dear friends of God is not about being ashamed, being unworthy.... Many of us only have a scant memory of the events in Selma fifty years ago today.... This memory today is not about shame or feeling guilty... this memory is about the hope of change....the hope of the gospel vision coming to fruition in our own day.

Underneath the story of Jesus in the gospels is the story of the Spirit... Jesus does nothing without being empowered by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth... Coleridge would say empowered by the creative imagination... I don't know all that much to say about the Holy Spirit... but one thing I know to be true:... that the Holy Spirit's chief agenda is change... change, transformation for the better.... Change for the better in a world that fears change.... And I know this: the Spirit is not safe... the Spirit is mysterious, dangerous, sometimes reckless... It will turn over the tables of our vanity; it will destroy our temples of illusion; and rebuild them into a world rightly made.... Love is like that.... And the Spirit is Love... this memory today is about love; love making history.... The gospel imperative is this: that wherever there is indignity, wherever there is injustice, wherever there is

despair... it is up to us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to right those wrongs.... to make history, people.... The past is gone, only present in our highly selective memory.... The future is utterly unknowable.... History is made in the present... and history is made by imaginative sacrifice... loving our neighbor as ourselves... offering our body and blood no less on the altar of sacred solidarity.... That is the only reality we know.... That is why we are here... that is our purpose... Remember that.... Always remember that.