

Proper 15 Year B

Well, we're still in the Gospel of John for two more Sundays.... This Sunday and next, then we get back to the Gospel of Mark.... We have been reading the narrative about the feeding of the five thousand, followed by Jesus' teaching about what this so-called miraculous feeding means.... The writers of this gospel pay a lot of attention to this story.... In a way they are obsessed with it... This story gives rise to the teaching that Jesus is the true bread come down from heaven... and then the jarring premise that this bread from heaven, this true, eternal nurture is Jesus' own flesh and blood... next Sunday we'll read about how those listening to Jesus' teaching get up and leave... grossed out in short....

You remember that this gospel is principally about Christology... that is, a theology, a philosophical reverie about who this person Jesus is... but I want to suggest that just as much; just as much as this gospel is about the theology of Jesus... It is just as much a theological anthropology... that is, a theology about the human community.... Jesus the archetype thereof.... Jesus the lens through whom we see ourselves... and perhaps the lens through which God sees us as well.... Indeed Jesus tells his disciples in this gospel that they are sent as he is sent.... And in the prologue we are told that Jesus, the Word, that which was in the beginning, is light... and that the light is the light of humankind.... This, of course, is a far cry from the medieval theology that we have inherited in our culture that would claim that humankind is depraved... that we are fallen... that there is no health in us... that we are unworthy to gather up the crumbs from under God's table... those of you who have been Episcopalians for a long time remember those words from the prayer of humble access that we said down on our knees just before receiving communion... ironically after we had been absolved from our sin... 'we are not worthy to gather up the crumbs from under thy table'... that is convenient... because if we are so pathetic then why bother in this life... why not wait for perfection in the life to come... why bother about anything other than lamenting our sin and hoping for our own salvation... The church for centuries has made a living on such a theology.... Fear and control.... and that, brothers and sisters, is a pathology from which we need to be set free.... In scripture, and particularly in this gospel, there is no warrant for such a theology.... For John, we are sent as the Christ is sent... and therefore we are the bread come down from heaven.... It is our flesh that is to be eaten... and it is our blood that is to be drunk... The incarnation, the enfleshment of God in earth, is the high mythology

of humankind.... It is a story of our true nature... the human come down from heaven as nurture... eternal nurture for our neighbor.... Because like the one who made us we bear the capacity to love; that's what it means to be made in God's image... that we love.... and love changes everything.... Jesus is the shining example of what it means to love.... To sacrifice... to wash his friends' feet... to welcome the stranger and outcast.... To feed, to heal.... To have skin in the game.

That is a phrase that Warren Buffett claims to have coined... you know, you recommend an investment in which you also have a stake... so if your investor suffers then you suffer with them.... Shakespeare actually coined the phrase in the Merchant of Venice.... Shylock renounces his responsibility of a greater good... he only serves himself. He has no stake in the fate of his friends... and of course that is his undoing.... The reality is that our skin is in the game... We are all connected to one another... all of us humans share almost exactly the same DNA... we are all of the same source, the same origin, the same substance.... We are all of the primordial word sung in the beginning of time.... We are one organism.... All made up of strands of intimate kinship... That's why Paul says that when one part of the body suffers we all suffer... when one is shamed and debased... we are all shamed and debased... Sin is the lie that tells us we are self-sufficient... that we are uniquely individual... We are not unique as individuals, and we have no identity except that which we have as members of the human community, living and dead... the never ending succession of those who suffer, those who exult, those who succeed, those who fail... those who experience love and loss... and grief and joy... none of us are unique. We are in intimate solidarity as humans... The post-modern notion that God made 'only one you'....made no one like you... is an illusion... We are all of the one flesh... we are all the same in infinite ways... We are all born, all of us are born for just one thing, and that is to love.... To offer as living sacrifices our bodies and blood... blood being life.... Body being labor.... our life and labor for the world... that is the theological anthropology of John... a high and noble calling, vital for God's dream for the world.

A number of us from All Saints and others from around the diocese and from other dioceses around the country, as far away as New York and New Hampshire, and California... gathered yesterday in Hayneville Alabama for the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of Jonathan Daniels.... Killed in cold blood by a shot gun blast by a part time sheriff's deputy.... Daniels, a young Episcopal seminarian, was in Lowndes county registering people to vote. He was one who realized that he had skin in the game.... That his well-being depended on the well-being of

others... that his dignity had everything to do with the dignity, or lack thereof, of his brothers and sisters languishing under the nightmare of Jim Crow Alabama.... And now today, there are still people who live in fear of corrupt power... people who still live violent lives.... People who are shamed for the color of their skin... people who literally live without hope of a better life....people who live in the nightmare of sin... And dear people of God, our skin is in the game... these people are ours to love.... Rheinhold Niebuhr said it best... that God's dream for the world is love... and the means of love is justice.... Justice, that ubiquitous word shot through our canon of scripture, both Hebrew scripture and New Testament... justice, that sacred means of granting well-being and dignity and hope and health... and the abundance of God's joy intended for all of us.

It was worth the trip to Hayneville just to hear our presiding bishop elect preach.... He said that when we were baptized, we were not joining a church, a sepia monument to our self-sufficiency, (my paraphrase)... no, we were not joining a church... we were baptized into a movement.... We, brothers and sisters, are revolutionaries... revolutionaries for justice... revolutionaries for love... revolutionaries for God's vision for the world set right... for the world freed from sin that hides insidiously within the status quo... sin that wreaks havoc among the powerless and the voiceless.... Sin that infects our institutions.

We have been baptized into a revolution, y'all... and the time is now... If we say we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is the prince of peace; the good shepherd, the true vine; that he is the bread come down from heaven... that his flesh is food... and his blood the drink of a life of infinite joy....that his life was lived for the good of the whole human community... then we best claim that legacy for ourselves; claim our legacy as children, friends of God... That is the theology of who we are.... Revolutionaries for love... revolutionaries whose only task is to change the world... whose only task is to bring the freedom that love always brings. It is who we are... and by the grace of God.... claim it.