

Proper 8 Year B 2018

Yesterday morning some forty children arrived at All Saints to board the bus for Camp Beckwith. Most of these kids, third to fifth graders, go to Leinkauf School just two blocks away. Most live within a couple of miles from All Saints. Most have never learned to swim. Many have never spent a night away from Mobile, much less had the opportunity to go to summer camp. I watched them file into Stirling Hall (if one can call it filing). Some were gleeful, some visibly anxious. The same was true of their parents... some were looking forward to a break from their children. Some were worried about their children being away for several days. Their arrival was chaotic, made all the more by their excited voices reverberating in Stirling Hall. Somehow Elizabeth Doyle and Karen McDonald brought from the chaos enough order to get these children with their medicine and their supplies onto the bus. It is always a bitter-sweet moment when the bus pulls away.... There are tears and there is joy amid this leave-taking. To us who are privileged, this is such a small thing; but to those who are not, it is a life changing experience.

I am always so proud of our parish for sending these kids to camp. We've been doing it for almost forty years, and we're known for it in Mobile, and around the diocese... but I'm always saddened as well. I'm always aware of the fact that

these children are, as we say, under-privileged... check that... These children have no privilege. Many of them either live with a single parent, or with their grandmother or an aunt. There are always a substantial number of them who sign up for camp, and then don't show up, because they have no transportation, or their care-giver after working two jobs over-slept or simply forgot to bring them on the appointed day. Many if not all of these children are poor... Many will not graduate from high school. Most won't go to college. Many of them are falling victim to what we now call food scarcity. Many of them live in unsafe environments. All of them are suspect to the powers that be because their skin is darker than the rest of us. They were born as, shall we say, outcasts through no fault of their own nor the fault of their parents. They have very few viable life choices, in particular the choice for self-determination. They are the poor; they are the least; they are the marginalized. And they... they are the ones for whom the Gospels were written.

We are now back into the fast-paced rhythm of Mark. In just a few short chapters Jesus has been baptized, called his disciples, he's healed people all over Galilee and beyond; he's cast out demons; calmed a storm; he's hung out with tax collectors, and ne'er-do-wells.... His notoriety has grown such that crowds are gathering to hear him speak and teach... They are coming to him for healing.

There is all this energy around him. For Mark it is all a blur, chaotic, as he makes his way towards Jerusalem and the fate that awaits him there. Our story today occurs just after Jesus has returned from the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee in the land of the Gerasenes where he cast a legion of demons into a herd of swine. Word has gotten out and the crowds are pressing upon him. Mark implies that all of Judea is coming to him... the whole known world as far as Jews were concerned. But these aren't the folks that have it all together, like you and me, that are coming. These aren't the comfortable looking for some spiritual novelty or a religious retreat. These are the lame and the sick and the mentally ill, and the lost... the poor and the disenfranchised; those who have been left out; those who have been shunned and shamed; the broken.... So that brings us to the central premise of this Gospel. The passage we read just now represents the heart of Mark's proclamation of what he coined as the "Good News of Jesus Christ".

Unlike Matthew, Luke, and John, you'll remember that there is no Resurrection appearance per se in this Gospel. After Jesus' crucifixion and burial the women go to the tomb of Jesus and find it empty. Only a young man is there who tells them Jesus has been raised; and that he will meet them in Galilee.... And yet throughout this Gospel the word for resurrection appears more than a dozen times... the paralytic lowered through the roof into Jesus' presence; Simon's

mother in law; the man with the withered hand; the blind man of Jericho... all of these are told by Jesus to “stand up”... the word for stand up in the Greek is “egerin”...It literally means to stand with dignity, and it is the root word for what we translate as Resurrection. So what we have in Mark’s Gospel is the writer pointing us from the empty tomb, back to Galilee, the place of ministry; back into the real world, the daily grind... and the writer wants us to look there (and here) for resurrection... not as some otherworldly bit of magic that happened a long time ago in a place far away... but as a reality of our daily life. Wouldn’t it be something if that were true?

So in today’s narrative we have a woman with a hemorrhage that has lasted for twelve years we are told, and we have a gravely ill girl, who in fact dies before Jesus can get to her, who, we are told, is twelve years old... both are healed and told to stand... to resurrect... and there is an odd reference in this story... we are told that upon touching Jesus’ cloak, power flows from him into the woman and she is healed; and the young girl who has died Jesus takes her hand and tells her to stand up... two resurrection appearances in one passage... so what do we make of this story as intelligent, post-modern, skeptical Christians. Literarily, the number twelve would suggest to the listener the twelve tribes of Israel... so resurrection has economic, social, and political significance. That’s one thing:...

the restoration of the dignity of occupied Israel. Most scholars agree that the Jesus movement was first and foremost a movement about the restoration of the people Israel up and against the oppressive power of the Roman Empire.

But I want to suggest that this story, at its heart, is about power and dignity. Indeed much of this gospel is about the abuse of power by the empire, Jesus' torture and crucifixion the prime example, and the resulting shame for the people who are occupied. But this is about the power of God in opposition to the power of the world; and it's about dignity in opposition to shame. This is about the power of Love, and the dignity that comes with being loved. And this is power that flows not only from Jesus the anointed of God, but it flows through all of us the baptized, the anointed of God. Jesus the model, the archetype of the Baptized. You'll remember that Baptism is Mark's theme in this Gospel. Both the woman and the young girl are brought back into the dignity of their community... they are raised, restored by love into well-being and dignity. These healings are acts of justice.

So the vocation of the Baptized is resurrection: Bearing Love to the shame and the indignities of our world... It is that theology, long ignored by the church, particularly the white western church... it is that theology that paints the gospels

intensely social, economic, and political; and intensely public. Faith is not private. It is public, because the gospels are about justice and the common good. It is that theology that makes the immigration issue, for example, not a partisan issue, liberal or conservative, republican or democrat, but a gospel issue. The issue of access to healthcare is not a partisan issue but a gospel issue. Expanding Medicaid in Alabama for the least of us is not liberal or conservative... it is gospel. Access to affordable education is a gospel issue. Our deteriorated penal system is now for punishment, not correction and rehabilitation... and the poor, and people of color are singled out disproportionately for incarceration.... That is a gospel issue. The dismantling of racism and all of its insidious vestiges is not just a good thing to do,... It is a gospel issue. Fair taxation... and by that I mean a progressive tax structure wherein the wealthy pay a higher percentage of tax than folks who can't afford the same percentage of an income that can't sustain them. That is a gospel issue... all of these have to do with dignity, and the freedom to live a good life... a good life, that is what God wants for all of us, because God loves all of us. To believe that resurrection is some singular supernatural act by God at a moment in history is to deny our responsibility as the baptized whose vocation is to raise up the broken among us into their true personhood. The liberation theologians of the 20th century in referring to the marginalized among us, coined the term: the

'non-person'. Our vocation is, through our privilege, our power.... Power that is wielded as Love... that we raise the non-persons into personhood.

That is why we send our poor neighbors' children to camp... to give them something of a chance at true personhood. That is why we speak out to our politicians about issues that affect the common good. That is why we show up at protests and rallies for equality and justice... because when one of our brother's or sister's dignity is compromised then it becomes our business. That is why we are to be proximate, as Bryan Stevenson puts it... proximate to the world's hurt.... Because in proximity there is empathy, something sorely lacking in our culture. And in proximity there is relationship... and things are changed by relationships.

All of the Gospel writers, and Paul; and the scribes of Hebrew scripture speak of the Kingdom of God.... As has the church over the ages... But we have spoken of it as some future thing... a beguiling utopia with streets paved with gold, no suffering, no pain, no problems, just bliss... But that of course is a fantasy. We live in the Kingdom of God now. The world as it is, is God's kingdom... This world that is so wracked with pain and violence, and fear, and worry, and dishonesty, and self-loathing; and chaos... And this world that is so very beautiful, and fascinating, and life giving, and regenerative.... Brothers and sisters this is the

world that God Loves; the whole of it... the kingdom of God is here and now, and it is a beautiful and mysterious mess. But there is one thing that redeems it all... And that is the presence of Love. God calls the whole of it good, because there is Love here... and Love only knows to raise people up... that is what these ancient scribes are trying to tell us.... The good news is that Love will not rest until all are empowered to stand..... To know God... to experience God in the flesh is to raise up our brother, our sister. The kingdom of God is now, good people. Let us be about the work of it.