

Pentecost 7, Proper 11; July 23, 2006, Yr B: Is. 57:14b-21; Psalm 22:22-30; Eph. 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44

This week my grandsons were trying to help me write my sermon and they offered some really good suggestions as to what I should write about. One of them said, well I think you should write about how there shouldn't be advertisements for beer on baby clothes.

While this topic doesn't seem to fit well into the readings we have been appointed for today, what did strike me was that from the mouths and hearts of these children came a powerful truth for all of us to hear. "Our children will learn what we teach them, just as the disciples learned from Jesus."

What was taught by Jesus in our lesson from Mark today was that even when we are tired and weary we are still to be serving God and God's people, in the manner in which we have been instructed. Because we aren't given a task and then told to do it when we have time or when we feel like it. Sometimes we have to try to fit in a time for our own renewal, sometimes we are tempted to tell the people to take care of themselves, but ultimately if we are called to serve in the midst of our exhaustion then we will be given the tools we will necessary to meet the needs of those whom we are called to serve.

The lesson from my grandsons this week for me was that we teach behaviors in all we do, those things that are subtle and those things that are not so subtle. As Episcopalians we have inherited a beautiful liturgy that speaks volumes to observers.

First of all even the word 'liturgy' is telling of our philosophy. 'Liturgy' literally means the work of the people. So we begin our worship with the understanding that we are not having something done for us or to us when we come to worship, we are a part of that—doing our work for worship.

In our coming together in the manner in which we do we are teaching future generations and visitors what we have come to understand about worship. We gather in the name of our Lord, and our liturgy is made of the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the liturgy of the Word we hear God's word to the church, we listen to the priest or homilists proclaim God's word among us, not just an inspirational talk, but an unfolding of the Word for our understanding. In the liturgy of the Eucharist we are called to the anamnesis of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf. We are called to celebrate and receive communion on each Sunday to remember the paschal mystery.

What we do in our worship reflects our understanding of our relationships with God and with each other. This is serious business. Lionel Mitchell in his book, "Praying Shapes Believing" says it like this: "The Church is most itself when it worships. That worship is grounded in the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our participation in it. The church is therefore the baptismal community that calls men and women to Christ and incorporates—literally plunges—them into that mystery. The Eucharistic community celebrates that mystery week by week as the people of God gather to hear the Word and to celebrate the anamnesis of the mystery in the Eucharistic banquet, the meal of God's kingdom in which we eat the bread of life, and drink the cup of salvation. The Church is the reconciling community in which men and women are reconciled to God and one another in the Paschal mystery."

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Jesus was tired, his disciples were weary; and yet there were people who needed them to be rested and ready to meet their needs. There were people who had come to hear what it was that this healer had to say and they could not be put off. So even when the church was not prepared, the people came to worship and to learn how to be followers. Jesus began by feeding the people with provisions that were blessed with a divine miracle.

Just as the child has no idea that he or she is promoting the buying and drinking of beer because of what is displayed on their clothes, we as Christians, often don't realize the impact we have on impressing others about what it means to be a member of a faith community and as a follower of Jesus the Christ. We must remember that people are watching, watching to see if we are Christians in name only or if we are acting like we profess Christians should be acting.

When we come and share this holy meal, kneeling side by side at the altar rail, at the foot of the cross—are we united with one another? When we hear the words; “Take eat this is my body which is given for you” do we understand this sacrifice was not just symbolic?

On that hillside long ago when Jesus instructed the disciples to pass out the five barley loaves of bread and the two fish for a crowd of thousands to share a testimony was given to all people across the expanse of time. This testimony tells us that when we sit at the feet of great teacher, when we stay in the presence of Christ we will be fed, nourished and nurtured in a sufficient manner that we will even have an abundance to share with others when we have been filled. You see in this story, the good news is present on so many levels. The good news is present in the fact that the people were not sent away, they were taken care of in their hour of need, they didn't need to find nourishment elsewhere. The good news is that when the disciples felt they had nothing left to give, Jesus furnished them with everything they needed. The good news is that when the people came together and were still, they were then able to see the power of God in their midst.

As members of the holy church of God we too are invited each week to approach the table of abundance to be filled with all we will need. The difference between us and the people on the hillside that day so long ago is that we are asked to make the physical statement of reconciliation by being invited to approach the altar by standing and coming together in the center aisle and walking together a diverse community that while different in many respects are still able to be willing to allow the reconciling love of Christ and the act of his life, death and resurrection to bring us together as one community of faith. You see it is in that act that what we are teaching is more powerful than any saying on a t-shirt might ever hope to be.

Every moment is a teaching moment and every moment is a learning moment—I pray you will allow yourself to be in the presence of the Holy One long enough to be filled with the love that desires only to give you life, and give it to you abundantly.

Amen