

Terry & Fred Quinn

Homily

1/18/06

John 1: 35 - 42

Theme: Discipleship

The baptism of Jesus is the first act of what is often termed his "public ministry." What do we mean by this? Some Biblical scholars suggest that ministry indicates "priest" and that when we speak of Jesus as a "message giver" this is an indication that he was only a teacher and/or preacher. Some feel that public activity is insufficient to describe what Jesus did. Marcus Borg says that if "mission" means that the person is sent to perform a service or function to affect the "here and now", that it is activity with a purpose and a concentrated commitment ---then referring to the public time of Jesus as his "mission" would include his message, deeds, and purpose as a Spirit-filled Jewish mystic. Therefore, Borg prefers to use the word "mission" and it seemed to make the most sense to us. Perhaps this is because when we completed our religious training we were sent out to the "mission."

Last Sunday's readings referred to this mission when Jesus called some simple fishermen and other disciples to follow him and spread the good news. Jesus also referred to the kingdom his mission was going to affect, not the kingdom familiar to the populace at the time (that being a temporal kingdom of power, majesty where the ruler was actually thought of as a god to whom reverence and obedience was given.) Nor was it the kingdom of the future in some distant heavenly place inhabited by a judgmental god, inspiring fear. The kingdom that Jesus referred to was the kingdom at hand ----the kingdom of the "here and now" or "kindom" as many biblical scholars refer to it---where the mission affected the lives of those around them and the surrounding creation---where the mission became one of peace and justice NOW. It's interesting that the gospel tells us that Jesus looked straight into

the eyes of those he called, indicating a type of charisma or "pull" --- the spirit within calling to them. I'm sure there are times when you have felt that you simply had to do something—or follow a certain path---or a certain person---you felt a pull---the spirit working within you. Perhaps that look was also to convey a focus, a focus, not on the frivolous or material or seeking of fame----but a focus on the "other" on the effect they would have not just on each other, but everyone they touched, who heard them—who spread the news of a new kind of spiritual kingdom. This is the kind of disciple that Jesus called, not to serve him, as some would say, but to serve each other and the "kingdom" around them. In the days of Christ, the kingdom recognized by them was one small part of what we know as our Earth today, one very small part of the magnificent universe that we are still discovering. Today we know that our actions can affect not just those in our immediate environment, but throughout the world. We're an instant message away! We're also an instant message away with the energy of our prayer. The coming week is a spirit-filled week. It is a week filled with "mission" and discipleship as we celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday and the inauguration of Barack Obama.

With mission and discipleship in mind, I'd like to read an excerpt from a speech made by Martin Luther King at the Southern Leadership Council in 1967--

Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I *did* believe we would overcome."

With the belief in peace and justice so imbedded in the words of Dr. King, I'd like to end first with a true story and then Terry will read the last paragraph from *The Audacity of Hope* by President-elect Barack Obama—

The story is about Claiborne Pell, who died on New years Day at the age of 90---a member of Congress who in an unassuming way fought for the poor and the marginalized and though he would have disputed it, was a true disciple who overcame opposition to insist on help for those less fortunate

than him. (tell story)

**Claibourne Pell died last Tuesday at the age of 90.**

**Claibourne Pell: A man who had a great ambition to improve the common good for his fellow man.**

**A few interesting facts about this great man:**

- **Born into a wealthy and honorable family:**
- **Son of a member of the House of Representatives.**
- **great grandson of congressman.**
- **Great great great grandson of a senator and vice-president.(George Dallas)**
- **His family were heirs to the P. Lorillard Tobacco Company fortune. (His family is no longer associated with the company.)**
- **His wife was heir to**
- **The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company. (A & P)**
- **He was a multimillionaire, but lived a humble frugal life, with little care for material possessions. At his funeral his grandson said that he owned a second-hand Chrysler convertible which was outfitted with tattered red upholstery held together with duct tape. When it finally fell apart, he bought a second-hand Dodge Spirit bought second hand from Thrifty Rental Cars.**

**Claibourne Pell was a senator from the State of Rhode Island for 36 years. He was greatly admired for being a gentle man who never used negativity toward his adversaries in the Senate or in his campaigns. Yet underneath his calm exterior he had a great strength and perseverance to achieve his objectives.**

**Perhaps one of the best examples of his strong perseverance was working for the passage of grants for low- income students for college. In 1972 colleges wanted the money as a form of financial aid, resisting direct giving of the money to the student. Senator Pell insisted that the student get the money directly. The Senate passed Pell's bill**

**But the House backed the colleges' version. Pell continued to argue that the program should help poor students directly just like the post-war GI Bill. Finally the Education committee came around to his view and Congress passed the Bill. Although it was against his wishes, the grants were eventually called the Pell grants. After three decades, more than 108 million grants have helped poor students get a college education. Thanks to Pell generations of Americans who might not been able to pursue a college education were successful in doing so.**

**Pell was the main sponsor of the bill that created the National Endowment For The Arts and The National Endowment of The Humanities.**

**In 1993 during the bitter confirmation battle over Roberta Achtenberg, a lesbian as Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Urban Development, Pell stated that his daughter was a lesbian and that he hoped that that would not be a barrier for Roberta. Achtenberg became the first openly gay person to be confirmed by the The US Senate.**

**Claibourne Pell worked for the common good.**

**In our own small way we can also do something to make the world a little better.**

Quote from the last 2 paragraphs of Audacity of Hope by Barack Obama

(speaking about reaction to recurrent visits to the Lincoln Memorial)

“At night, the great shrine is lit but often empty. Standing between marble columns, I read the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address. I look out over the Reflecting Pool, imagining the crowd stilled by Dr. King’s mighty cadence, and then beyond that, to the floodlit obelisk and shining Capital dome.

And in that place, I think about America and those who built it. This nation’s founders, who somehow rose above petty ambitions and narrow calculations to imagine a nation unfurling across a continent. And those, like Lincoln and King, who ultimately laid down their lives in the service of perfecting an imperfect union. And all the faceless, nameless men and women, slaves and soldiers and tailors and butchers, constructing lives for themselves and their children and grandchildren, brick by brick, rail by rail, calloused hand by calloused hand, to fill the landscape of our collective dreams.

It is that process I wish to be part of. My heart is filled with love for this country.

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