

The Inclusive Community

March 22, 2009

Homily of Kathy Bailey

Healing

John 3: 14-21

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life."

We all have had the experience of witnessing an event and telling it later only to find that someone else (often a spouse) remembers it totally differently. I dare say that we have all, at one time or another, been determined to make a point and have told a story with a clear emphasis on a particular aspect, in order to dramatize what we most want our audience to hear. I'm sure that Fred our story teller can cite examples of how he uses stories in slightly different ways to meet the needs of each audience. Thus so is scripture.

Early Christians, inspired by the God within, dramatized what they had heard. They needed to express their reflections; what they believed. It was important that people understand the amazing story.

We are all struggling to define our world in such a way that gives meaning to our lives. We attempt to structure the world around us; to make some kind of sense. Without a sense of order, life can be extremely frightening and painful. What a relief to sometimes, somehow find reason and order.

Yes, early people of faith reflected back on what they knew of the man called Jesus. They saw his goodness. They respected and perhaps even envied the deep spirituality, his closeness to God. They told the stories to highlight their awe. How wonderful to believe that there is an all powerful God somewhere in the universe who loves us so much. How much you ask? Enough to "give his son", his only son. Everyone can relate to the amazing love necessary to sacrifice one's only child. The importance of this understanding was underscored by the belief that such faith could only lead to eternal life. The people of the time truly believed that they found the way.

How important that all understand that Jesus came to save the world not to condemn it. This was not a vengeful God. This was a loving God. How reassuring the belief.

As a teacher I have to voice each day's activities in the form of an objective. We must be constantly attentive to what we want the students to be able to do.

Therefore, I find myself pondering my objective as I come before this congregation.

As clearly as I can state it, my objective is to explore faith, and pose questions that will lead each of us to a deeper understanding of our mission here on earth, our opportunity to be co-creators with God.

I ask you to take my words and thoughts from whence they come. I am no biblical scholar stating what to believe. I am struggling enough with my own beliefs. I am simply here to raise questions and ideas that will allow each of us to reflect on what is good and what is right and how we can use the infinite gifts we have been blessed with to make our world a better place.

I have frequently shared my reason for attending church each Sunday. As I have said, it is among my more selfish actions. My hope is that there is more truth than fantasy in my goal to be fed by the spirit on Sunday so that I am recharged to go and do "God's work the rest of the week"

Yet, this basic act of faith has been transcended. I now am involved in two other activities that are feeding my faith even more. Number 1) Our work as a community to rewrite our communion prayers. Hearing everyone's thoughts, understandings, and experiences then struggling with the language to find a way to express our collective faith, has led me to a new paradigm of understanding. Number 2) My involvement in selecting meaningful music and writing and delivering homilies is pushing me beyond mundane understanding to a deeper experience. I sincerely pray that all who are here are also finding our development as a community a refreshing spiritual experience. Though I am probably correct to say that at times this search leads to frustration and confusion. This task has become even more challenging as Dick is leading us through new understandings of God and Jesus.

My student's frequently complain that "I am confusing them" This happens each time I attempt to move them from their basic understanding of arithmetic and challenge them to solve problems with more depth and life applications. I constantly try to reassure them that an important step in learning is confusion. When we explore ideas and realities beyond our comfort zone, we often have to work through confusion and doubt. Well, that folks is what is happening to many of us as we explore our faith. To quote my students "this is making me think and that makes my head hurt"

We have come to this place with a variety of understandings and questions but with many concepts well formed since youth. Even with our questions I think I'm safe to say we had

each reached a certain comfort zone with our understanding of God, Christ and our relationship to scriptures.

The words "For God so loved the World" were embedded in our minds from an early age. For the most part we were comfortable with a God up in heaven listening to our prayers.

We now are recognizing a God who is here on earth, part of everything around us. A creator who formed us in such a way that our potential is unlimited.

We struggle to answer questions that seemingly will help us understand. Yet how often we are struggling with the wrong questions. We get hung up on the Biblical stories. We fret over what really happened and miss the point of the stories entirely. We have great emotionally charged debates of details. To quote Rev. Dick Scaine "Who Cares"

We have been created with amazing abilities. We know that our brains are capable of much more than we ever could imagine. We are rapidly discovering the workings of the brain through an assortment of imaging techniques. A recent Time magazine explored the relationship between faith and healing. They discussed the images of the brain that show the brain activity responding to faith issues. We also know of the chemical reactions in our bodies that lead to illness and to health. We can scientifically explain more and more interactions in our beings as we react to stress and negative issues as well as those positive thoughts, laughter, meditation and prayer. The article talks about a "helper's high an exhilaration following an altruistic act, in one study, 90% of people said such acts help relieve stress and even pain. They also pointed out that cortisol, the stress hormone released by the adrenal gland when lowered can reduce blood pressure, regulate blood sugar and boost immunity.

Jesus tapped into the power of healing. Jesus set an example that human kind has explored and labored to understand. Jesus modeled using our power for good. Marcus Borg in discussing "The Mighty Deeds of Jesus" concluded that "Jesus was a healer and an exorcist." I quote, "Indeed, more healing stories are told about him than about any other figure in the Jewish tradition. In all likelihood, he was the most remarkable healer in human history."

What does this say to us in Nutley NJ, the year 2009? What are the important questions for your life and mine. Can we learn from the stories in scripture taking them for what they are, an attempt to capture the essence of the power of God. We know that the universe is filled with powerful vibrations. We know that a collective focus on the vibrations for good and health has a power to heal, whether we are healing ourselves, others, or the world itself. Are we capitalizing on the vibrations that help us grow and heal or are we sometimes

sidetracked by the vibrations that cause pain and suffering. Of course we want to believe that we are constantly radiating the good. Yet, sometimes I wonder.

Today's scripture tells us that Christ the light has come into the world ...Those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.