

July 18, 2010, Pentecost season

Lections: Amos 8:1-12; Ps.52; Col. 1:15-29; Luke 10:38-42

Luckily the drive to Pembroke took a while, giving me time to reflect on the many gifts of Anne O'Leary, GSIC, my spiritual director who died this week and whose soul was commended to God from the chapel at the Marguerite Center among her grey sisters. Anne had held my soul for three years as I made the transition to Canada and to the Anglican Church. In our monthly meetings we examined the God parts of my life, where I recognized presence or absence, considered my actions and thoughts, always returning to the feet of Jesus – to hope in God's care and love. I will miss her wisdom.

At the time for eucharist I leaned over to the woman seated next to me, anxious about whether I would be included. "Is this eucharist only for Catholics?" I asked since the priest had not made any exclusionary statements. "It is for all who believe," she answered. So I joined all who were at the funeral and finally shared a eucharist with Anne. On her way back from the table, another woman tapped me on the shoulder. "Are you Linda?" I nodded. "Anne loved you, you know." Yes, I know and I loved her too.

Spiritual direction is an intimate time where both companions are re-grounded in love and faith. This deep listening and speaking time joined us across denominations to consider the one good thing Jesus speaks about in today's gospel from Luke, a willingness to be still, to consider how the precious gift of life is to be spent in response to God's gift of everything, even times of struggle and times of blessing.

Jesus at home with Martha and Mary employed the action reflection model sometimes used in spiritual direction so that Martha might become more aware of her worries and distractions. It is not so much her busyness, perhaps, but her restlessness in daily tasks that threaten to undo her primary relationships. I believe he calls her back to love, the ground from which all hospitality flows, which is clearly one of her values. Jesus invites her back to her truest self.

Life in churchland is full of tasks too. We can become worried and distracted by all that needs to be done: counting money, making visits, keeping the building running, maintaining the gardens, organizing outreach, changing the bulletin boards, keeping on top of committee meetings, finding people to fulfill ministries. These are accompanied by those who, like Mary, devote themselves to nurturing faith in small groups like Hildegard's circle or home church, Bible study or prayer groups, in faithful attendance at worship, in ministry relationships, in reading and saying our prayers for others as well as for ourselves. All are necessary for our common life; many of these activities of faith are carried out over time, not just on Sunday.

The prophet Amos is a harsh critic of those who don't carry their faith through their business week; he holds greedy merchants in special contempt for their treatment of the poor. The summons to faith may be simple: love God, neighbor and self, but it is sometimes a hard task to penetrate the fog of denial. And so he uses direct, pointed, judgmental language, echoed in the psalm, to shock and make aware. "In a world of pervasive corruption, the prophet crafts words that aim to overwhelm...that must illustrate and overcome hardened hearts" and embedded social ills, says Willis Jenkins in *Feasting on the Word*. (p244). Amos calls those with economic power and clout to correct injustice and inequality with a reminder about accountability to God.

At first glance the image of a basket of summer fruit is a still life of abundance. But at a closer glance the spots of rot are present; hoarding it will be unsatisfying. A lack of sharing will lead to fruitlessness, a famine where there is a scarcity of good news, or hope, or even respite. Faith is about more than personal, private happiness and individual gain; it is about the communal shalom that God intends.

Paul's letter to the Colossians brings us back to the One who is the head of the church. Jesus is the One who grounds our worship and our work. Paul's language is full of mutual participation. Living in harmony with the gospel of Christ brings us to our truest selves.

Once in a while I make a thank offering over and above my regular pledge. It is a way of marking a particular awareness of blessing. Some people honor birthdays or anniversaries this way; others focus on gratitude for the people in the lives or another special thing. Today my thank offering is for Anne O'Leary whose care and companionship was a gift from God that I won't forget. When I was out of work she wouldn't allow me to give her any payment for her time; she said the offering of myself was enough. Indeed, her companionship on this faith journey was priceless to me. And her judgments were easy to bear. Amen.+

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