

Pentecost 11B, August 9, 2009

Lections: 2Sam. 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; Ps. 130; Eph. 4:25-5:2; John 6: 35, 41-51

Today's lessons begin with David's lament over the death of his son Absalom and we hear his anguish echoed in the words of the psalm. The letter to the Ephesians contains advice about how to heal the pain of conflicts in community and in relationship. David and Absalom had no more time to reconcile and in John's gospel we sense that those in conflict with Jesus are growing in numbers and intensity. What should we take as bread, as insight from these lessons? A few weeks ago I asked us to look at the places where our hands had been; today we might look at our words. Jesus, I think, wants us to understand how words live. For the writer of the gospel Jesus is the divine word in whom God lives and loves all of creation, offering all of us holy and life-giving connections.

The phone call came four days before I left on vacation – a daughter's anguish about the impending death of her father. Out of the depths of anticipatory grief she was calling for help. Would I please come for a visit? Could I interrupt time with my family in Boston and come to see her and her dad? Her father was 94 with a failing heart. He was someone whose heart was large enough to welcome me into my last parish and to be an usher at my wedding to Melissa. I loved him. The only tension between us came when I left the United States to come to Canada. "Who will bury me now?" he said with tears. Lily, the new priest buried him on Thursday. He intended to live until his hundredth year. I made my way to him at the hospital. He did not need any additional years – no regrets, no need for reconciliations. He left, having come from love, going toward love, being at all times surrounded by love. He lived a full and rich life of faith – he offered the bread of love to others and it returned to him. How could I not go and speak a last word of love to him?

Living in love is our challenge. Conflict emerges from difference, from our inability to reconcile the myriad diversity that is present in relationships – in families, in communities, in the world. How do Christians become an example of reconciling love, an embodiment of God's love? Paul calls it being imitators of God. Do you remember a song that we learned perhaps at camp since it is not in our hymnal – "they will know we are Christians by our love?" That catchy tune and its important words are more than sentimental and naivety as some have charged. Singing it reminded us of our call. And we know that the type of sacrificial love it speaks about is work, soul work in response to what God offers to us. From the instructions to the community in Ephesus it is a code of expected behavior. It is our choice. And it is often coming to us revealed in the words of others. We look everywhere for the bread of insight God offers.

So I am wondering how our words have a life beyond us, how they have the power to draw us into truth that nourishes connection. How they reflect God's word to us or how they erase it. Part of my trip to Boston was to spend time with my children and grandchildren and to see good friends. It was also a time to talk with my youngest daughter and her fiancé about their wedding which will occur in October. "What do you want me to talk about?" I asked. "Talk about commitment," she replied. Talk to us about the work of love, its staying power, how it forgives and transforms, how God is in the

spaces between us. Talk about how we are drawn into the mystery of God's love. What words, what bread will I offer?

Vacation for me allows time to read, to reflect and respond. It restores a loving balance that nourishes. It is connection time with Melissa and with others. As I think about all the words of these past weeks, nourishing and life-giving, related to God, I remember:

Conversations with strangers at breakfast at the inn in Vermont – they are from S.Carolina and worried about the 'new' government (Health care reform) Words of encounter.

Lively words with the staff and owner of an independent bookstore in Shelburne, Vt.

Loving and teasing words over a magnificent dinner with friends of 30 years; I have invited them to Ottawa in May – he is the bishop of Vermont.

Book words from The Birth House (Nova Scotia), Water for Elephants, and my new favorite, The Book Thief. The love letter film, Julie and Julia.

The sermon preached by The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church; that Integrity worship drew 1200 people.

The encouragement of a crowd at the 4th Annual International Duct Tape Boat Regatta made it hard to leave the lake in Vermont. Four heats of hopefuls in their vessels made only of cardboard and duct tape were remarkable. One child whose creation lasted less than 5 minutes in the water carried the soggy shape to shore while the folks gathered near him applauded and yelled, "Good try!!! Next year!!! Next year" It brought a tear to my eye.

What word is bread from heaven for you at this time in your life? What word do you need to speak? What needs to be spoken? Where will the words come from to nourish your soul? Every week our liturgy is a little practice session in the words of life – words of prayer for others, words of confession and reconciliation, words of hope and promise, words of blessing, of commendation for our work in the world. Pay attention today and this week to the words, to the bread which comes from God and which we offer to others in God's name. Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera