

“OUR CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY” (5/30/10)

SCRIPTURES: Romans 5: 1-5 & John 16: 12-15

KEY CONCEPTS: 21st century spirituality, spiritual commitment in the “Ordinary Times”

OPENING COMMENTS:

“Living the Rhythms: Ordinary Time”. Throughout history the Church has struggled with what to call the 5 month period of time between Pentecost Sunday and the 1st Sunday of Advent – so from late May until the Sunday after Thanksgiving – there is this long liturgical season that contains no major holy days. Some denominations have tried to name this period Whitsuntide, Kingdom tide or the season after Pentecost. Other churches have given up on trying to “name or identify the season & simply call it “Ordinary Time”.

And isn't that about right for our lives? Isn't much of life –sometimes 5 out of 12 months of the year (or 42% of a year) - somewhat ordinary? And yet, even “ordinary days” can be cause for celebration! “Ordinary Time” invites us to consider the rhythms that sustain us between the major “high holy days” of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter & Pentecost. This period of time (from Pentecost to Advent) can remind us that we spend much of our lives dealing with the day to day, often unpredictable, occurrences. The “goings on” shape & ultimately comprise the bulk of our lives. We are called to create & craft holiness & spiritual maturity out of the chaos & confusion – to fashion extraordinary lives out of ordinary days. *(Summarized from Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer, Jan Richardson, 249)*

A PRAYER FOR THE BEGINNING OF ORDINARY TIME:

During this liturgical season of “Ordinary Time”, we remember that God dwells & working even in ordinary times & places. We never know when the Divine Presence will show forth as we go about our daily work & lives. We collectively celebrate “the ordinary times” by lighting 3 candles as we continue in our worship this day. Amen.

FIRST CANDLE – The Present: (Light this candle)

This is the candle of the present. This is where we are together. Our time & our energy are gathered into this space. Here we recognize one another, we know one another & we are known.

SECOND CANDLE – The Past: (Light this candle)

This is the candle of the past. This is the time before any of us knew one another, the time when we were in our mother's womb & she was in her mother's womb, & all that is to be is contained in the very being of God.

This 2nd candle, the candle we light to remember our past, is where sections of today's readings reside. We will stop for a moment to consider “this past” as seen in the Gospel of John & the reading from Romans.

GOSPEL READING – JOHN 16: 12-15:

The reading from John's Gospel notates a believer's relation to the world. The words in verse 12 – set centuries ago, still apply as past meets present.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” (v. 12)

How many times have we – on just an ordinary day – received news that forever changed our lives? The loss of a job, of a relationship, a bad diagnosis, the death of a loved one...

And how many times in the past have you literally (or figuratively) covered your ears because you knew – intuitively – someone was about to tell you something bad, that you didn't want to hear? Likewise, how many times have we said, "Don't tell me, I don't want to know?" when facing a difficult time that radically alter our "ordinary times"?

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." (v. 12)

Just how loving was it for Jesus to "wait & not tell His followers what they couldn't bear anyway?" And how loving have some of you been – to each other & to people beyond this Church – as you tempered a hard message, with time, prayer & love?

EPISTLE READING – ROMANS 5: 1-5: (ONLINE READING)

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, which we celebrate most notably on Pentecost Sunday (last Sunday) – as a companion who would help us in our most difficult times. The reading from Romans, chapter 5, reminds us that we have been

- Accepted by God via Christ
- Entered God's life giving & life making dominion
- God's purpose – via Christ – was much more than mere atonement – rather the sheer grace, love & acceptance was given for something far greater
- Prepared audience for the call for righteous living in chapter 6
- Life's reality: Suffering – Endurance – Character – Hope – Doesn't disappoint because of God's love in our hearts via the Holy Spirit

TRANSITION:

Even as our readings are situated in the past, they were recorded in an effort to motivate & encourage us not only to live in this present moment, but also to face the future – come what may – with an assurance & a hope that God's love is with us – ALL the days of our lives.

THIRD CANDLE – The Future: (Light this Candle)

This is the candle of the future. I light this candle because we believe in the past & we believe in the present. Because we have touched these times (& they have touched us). I know there is energy that goes on ahead of us. Because there is tangibility, Because we have marked these times, I have hope for the future.

Bless to us, O God, these times of present & past & future. May these flames of dwelling & of memory & of hope become an endless ring of blessing to you. Amen.

(Summarized from Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer, Jan Richardson, 251-252)

CONCLUSION:

I conclude this morning with a few rhetorical questions...

If it is true that **Suffering** produces **Endurance** that produces **Character** that produces **Hope** that doesn't disappoint – then is this part of how we grow up spiritually?

And in your suffering, in your difficult times of life – have you matured & developed an enduring character – that would not give up hope...on yourself, one another or God?

And are you **WILLING** to allow God to use the situations of our "ordinary times" to mature us spiritually in order to more positively impact the people who know/love you; this church – Our Hope MCC; & the larger community & world?