

Easter 6C
May 9, 2010

St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's

Rogation Sunday – blessing the soil!
Mother's Day

Acts 16.9-15
Ps 67
Revelation 21.10; 21.22-22.5
John 14.23-29

We have quite an intersection of themes this Sunday. It's Mother's Day. It's Rogation Sunday. It's the 6th Sunday of Easter. It's the Sunday before Ascension Day which comes on Thursday.

Probably the easiest one to breeze by is Rogation Sunday. The Rogation days are really MTW this week, the three days before Ascension Day. You don't hear much about them any more but they have been around for 1500 years. Rogation means supplication and I admit that confused me because all I had ever heard about regarding rogation days was a blessing of the crops as an agricultural occasion.

Its literal roots, no pun intended, were days of prayer, fasting, abstinence and supplication to appease the anger of God for the sins of the world and to draw God's blessing on the fruits of the earth for a bountiful harvest. Elizabeth I of England ordered the "perambulation of the parish" at Rogationtide; a rogation procession around the boundaries of the church property to determine the demarcations between parishes and find the boundary stones; so it was also called the beating of the bounds.

In those older days, the parish was not the church building, but the area. People living within its boundaries were members of that parish and the clergy was responsible for all of them. There are still areas of the country that have parishes instead of counties, Louisiana, for example. On Rogation Sunday we honor its presence and history in the church, using its Collect after the Prayers of the People and going out to the Memorial Garden after the service to bless some soil for you to take home if you'd like.

In this Easter season, as we are reminded theologically and concretely about the vanished boundary between life and death through the Resurrection of Jesus, I'm reminded that one of our early astronauts commented as he looked down on our magnificent planet that there were no lines drawn on it. No lines for latitude or longitude, no lines for countries or states. No boundaries. Just a shimmering blue jewel suspended in God's astonishing creation.

The readings for today are for Easter 6, not rogation or Mother's Day, but the connection can be made for both. The Church does not "recognize" Mother's Day as it is a completely secular holiday, but it reminds me that there are often references to God and Jesus as Mother. Some of them come associated with images of militant feminist theology which make some people's skin crawl, but Julian of Norwich's view of Christ as Mother (and brother and savior) is over 700 years

old. Our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori preached a sermon just after she was elected where she said, “[the author of the letter to the] Colossians calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead. That . . . tear-stained labor of the cross bears new life. Our mother Jesus gives birth to a new creation – and you and I are his children.”

I’m pretty certain Jesus would not have thought of himself as Mother. But one thing that binds us to each other as well as to Jesus is that we all have human mothers. And in the best of circumstances, mothers mean love, protection, comfort, guidance, and faithfulness. Someone who loves us when we behave badly. Someone who takes us back when we stray. Someone in whose presence we can find peace. Someone who will not leave us. It sounds like Jesus. . . .

The lectionary is preparing us for Christ’s Ascension this week by returning us to pre-Holy Week and Jesus’ words to his friends as he’s preparing them for his death and departure. He has had words for them to love one another, and he gives the gift of his peace. Jesus is teaching his friends what it will be like to love God and go on without his physical presence. Sometimes we understand our mothers better after they are gone. But he knows this will not be easy for them and likely a fearful thought. Presiding Bishop Katharine continued: “If we’re going to keep on growing into Christ-images for the world around us, we’re going to have to give up fear.” Christ’s blessed words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid” are addressing the disciples’ fear that they would lose him and be alone. They are about his continuing presence and the peace which will come from it through the gift of the Advocate or the Holy Spirit.

This peace that he is giving which passes human understanding is not as the world gives. It is not simply the absence or cessation of bad things like war or conflict. Geoffrey Hoare writes that the peace Jesus promises as he takes leave might include such things, but the peace he gives is nothing less than the consequence of the presence of God. His going away will not produce a situation of lostness or fear, but a new era.

It’s not over at Easter. Easter begins the transition between one reality and another. Jesus will live beyond his departure through the Holy Spirit as the ongoing presence of the revelation of God. For those for whom the fleshly Jesus is no longer present, the experience of the *living* Jesus continues in and through the permanent presence of the Spirit. A new era is dawning, a new creation springing forth, and there is reason for joy. Biblical scholar and author Francis Maloney has written that Jesus’ upcoming departure will not be a moment of tragic desolation for the disciples [like his crucifixion was], but the beginning of the time of the Holy Spirit, a time of love, belief, joy and peace. We will never be without Jesus.

There is a camp song about how we as Christians will break down the dividing walls between us. With the gift of another Advocate, a companion and guide also called the Paraclete, we are assured that there are no walls, no boundary lines, between Jesus and us. Throughout the history of Israel, the inside the walls of the Temple was the Holy of Holies. The place where God resided. The place where God’s presence could be most profoundly encountered.

In only a few years, Rome will destroy the Temple in Jerusalem. But God will not be bound by time or space or held inside walls. All of creation, the land, sea and air, each of our bodies, yours and mine, are now temples of God’s presence. Jesus will not have abandoned us by his return to God. God’s home is among mortals. The holy city of the New Jerusalem has settled upon the

earth. The symbols of the descended city are indicators of a reality beyond our imagining. They point beyond any glory we can bring to mind to that peace which passes all understanding. In the new heaven and the new earth God's presence is everywhere.

The boundaries between God and God's creation are gone. A boundary between us and all of creation doesn't exist. We are one with this universe and all that is in it.

Part of the way we love God is by lovingly caring for all that we have been given; caring for creation in the name of the Creator. We are of the earth and today we will bless some soil for you to take home if you'd like. We'll do that in the Memorial Garden, as there is no other place when we are most clearly reminded that we are of the earth. Reminded that there is no boundary between creation and us and that we are called also to be friends of the earth. An earth with no dividing lines drawn on it. We are bound to each other; through our own mothers, Mother Earth, and Jesus our Mother, brother, and savior.

Gail Wheatley+