

Proper 7C
Pentecost 4
June 20, 2010

Father's Day

Said services at 8 and 10 with graduation blessings for Nels Winn (PAHS) and Anne Mitchell (Master's in Special Ed from Old Dominion)

1 Kings 19.1-4 (5-7) 8-15a
Ps 42 and 43
Galatians 3.23-29
Luke 8.26-39

After having been gone eight days to the diocesan College for Congregational Development in Federal Way, the question of the week has been: "Well, what did you do there?" followed closely by, "Was it worth it?" The answer to the first one is probably just a series of words: eat, large group, small group, eat, walk, large group, small group, eat, walk, sleep. Repeat x 8.

The second question, was it worth it, will be determined over time. Anne Mitchell, Gary Heaton, and I will be working on that part over the next year, implementing a congregational development project [here] and going back next June to do it all over again! We were given abundant information on organizational models, how to view your congregation, the mission of the church, etc. But the only concrete one I can show you was given as my placemat at our final dinner, drawn by Sue Clary from St. Luke's in Sequim who was one of the trainers. I randomly sat down at a spot and this was the placemat: [my apologies, website readers; you'll need to rely on the description]

This congregational model is called Gather, Transform, Send.

In the center circle are the words: Transformation of our hearts, minds and actions to become more conformed to and expressive of the image of Christ. One arrow into the circle says 'gather,' one arrow out of the circle says 'send,' and another would make it a complete cycle. The center of what we do as a church is transformation; the changing of a life in small and large ways, sometimes quietly, sometimes noisily, but always toward becoming more like the image of Christ. Gather, transform, send.

At our Wednesday morning Eucharists we have been using a variety of Eucharistic prayers over the past year or so. We have just begun a new one which is Celtic in nature and has Scottish roots. Listen to its post-communion prayer:

In gratitude, in deep gratitude
for this moment,
this meal,
these people,
we give ourselves to you.

Take us out

to live as changed people
because we have shared the Living Bread
and cannot remain the same.

Ask much of us,
and expect much from us,
encourage many through us.

So. Lord, may we live to your glory,
both as inhabitants of earth
and citizens of the commonwealth of heaven.
Amen.

We have gathered together to share this meal and leave the table transformed, unable to remain the same for what we have shared, and sent out to live to Christ's glory as citizens both of the earth and of the kingdom of God.

If this is the mission of St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's and of the capital C Church, then we have examples in the scriptures today.

The reading in First Kings about Elijah is one of my favorites. When I first started seriously reading the daily office, these stories of Elijah were the first I encountered so they have been particularly important to me. Unfortunately, the lectionary has separated today's story from its prior one so I'll fill in the blank just a little. In Chapter 18, Elijah is on Mount Carmel and faces off against 450 prophets of the god Baal to decide which deity, Yahweh or Baal, is the true God of Israel. It is a terrible scene of destruction as all 450 prophets of Baal were slain. Yahweh triumphs through Elijah's bold and even cocky leadership.

As Trevor Eppheimer writes, now here in the very next chapter, Yahweh's cocksure prophet comes unhinged. Afraid for his life after hearing of Jezebel's desire to eliminate him, Elijah flees to the wilderness and asks to die rather than face her wrath. Elijah, who earlier stood tall against 450 rivals, wants to opt out of life altogether and holes up in a cave on Mount Horeb, thinking and perhaps even whining that he has to go it alone, that it is all up to him.

We sometimes think this passage is about seeing God in the silence. Well, maybe, but I think God is also found in the wind and the earthquake and I'm guessing you've experienced all of them. The bottom line in this story is about transformation. When the Lord passes by, Elijah is given the proverbial kick in the pants, transformed from cowering to the courageous prophet he will be again, and sent – back on his way to Damascus. It is a transformed Elijah who will be on the mountain of transfiguration with Moses and Jesus.

Paul writes to the Galatians about the transformation of baptism; being clothed with Christ. All the world is being transformed: no longer Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female. All one in Jesus. It was earth-shattering then and it is earth-shattering transformation now.

And that poor man possessed in Luke's gospel by a thousand demons. Another of my favorite stories. A radical boundary-crossing story of transformation. Not only was Legion possessed and out of his mind, he lived among the tombs, naked, wild, and was a Gentile. He didn't wait for the Lord to pass by, he ran to Jesus, fell at his feet, and was transformed, literally body, mind and spirit. And then Jesus sent him - home to declare how much God had done for him.

Transformation of a life means change. Sometimes we prefer the devil we know to the freedom we do not, writes David Lose. Effecting change, personally or as a community can be more difficult than stilling storms or casting out demons. But transformation is different from change; it has a component of desire, of yearning, of reaching for God in the silence and the wind and the earthquakes so that we might become more conformed to and expressive of the image of Christ **[the words on the placemat]**. Each week we gather here – at the table – to open ourselves to the possibility that we might be transformed through prayer, scripture, community, and the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist so that our response might be:

Dear Lord, **[Take]** Send us out
to live as changed people
because we have shared the Living Bread
and cannot remain the same.

Gail Wheatley+