

Sixth Sunday of Easter (and Mother's Day)
May 13, 2007

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Scriptures: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 5:1-9

Each week, when I am preparing a sermon, I feel a little bit like a cook who goes into the kitchen to see what ingredients are available for preparing something nutritious. What supper is depends in large part of what ingredients are there.

Well today, there were three main ingredients that need to be included in the sermon somehow. First, there is Mother's Day, which depending on who you ask, began, through the efforts of a woman named Julia Ward Howe, with the original Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870, or is simply a celebration that has in origins the ancient fertility rites of spring.

Secondly this is the day near the end of the school year that we have elected as the day in which the students who have been studying with Miss Araceli all year long will come to receive their First Communion. They have been learning Bible stories, the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, strengthening their foundation for faith.

Today they come to the Table to receive the bread and wine for the first time. They begin, what will hopefully be a lifetime of being nourished with another kind of food, a food that will strengthen them to more fully live out their faith in the world.

And last of all, there are the texts for the sixth Sunday of Easter. Two texts especially called my attention: the Gospel lesson and the words from Acts. In Acts 16 Paul is called to the city of Philippi where he met Lydia. The text tells us that Lydia is a worshipper of God, which means she was a person who revered God, who probably observed the 10 Commandments, who possibly was compelled by the words of the prophets and the call to work for justice and live in peace. She was from Thyatira, some distance away, and she was a dealer in purple cloth (which, today, would be like saying she was a yacht dealer). That meant she was a traveler, a woman wealthy in her own right. She welcomed Paul into her household and she and her family were baptized. We later learn that she used her ample resources to fund the work of the early church.

And in the Gospel lesson, we see Jesus and the man who laid by the pool Beth-Zatha for 38 years. He had no one to carry him into the pool. He needed someone to help him get there. What he actually needed was an encounter with Jesus.

Now, what I usually do when I am looking at my "ingredients" is that I start to look for connections. And the first one that popped out at me when I was getting started was the connection between the Gospel text and the children. So far as I know, none of the young people who will be receiving their First Communion have their driver's licenses. They each needed someone to bring them to church. They each needed someone to help them encounter Jesus through the Bible stories and classes, through worship and being part of a Christian community.

Some years ago we decided to make First Communion instruction last from September to May instead of just being Saturday mornings for a month or two. I truly commend those

parents, padrinos, grandparents, aunts and uncles, who take seriously the promise made at baptism to faithfully bring their children to the Lord's house, to teach them the Lord's prayer and 10 commandments, to provide for their Christian education. The children need someone willing to bring them, to help them encounter Jesus.

Actually just about everyone needs someone to help them encounter Jesus. A few folks will come through a church door because of the sign on the front. But the vast majority come because a friend or family member cared enough to bring them. Which ought to make us ask ourselves, what person in my life is waiting for me to help them encounter the Lord, the love of God? Hopefully they don't have to wait 38 years.

All of this then, connected back to Lydia, the woman who used her resources to help Paul spread the Gospel. In her own way, Lydia made it possible for many early Christians to encounter Jesus. She did what she could, with what she had, to further God's purposes in the world, to proclaim Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God, and the idea of community as the Body of Christ, a community that broke down all the barriers of race and class and gender, so that all people might share God's abundant blessings.

Like Lydia, mothers, grandmothers, women in general, over the centuries have used their resources to be faithful followers of Jesus, becoming the Body of Christ, working for the Kingdom of God,

Which then brings me back, full circle to Mother's Day. But not the Hallmark Card version of Mother's Day, the one that is all about saying "thank you" to mom for being such a great mom. The one that is about cards and flowers and candy, and, if you believe the commercials, jewelry. In that version, Mother's Day is all about the rewards of motherhood and of seeing children grow and mature.

Now, there is nothing wrong with any of that, but it bears little resemblance to the original Mother's Day in the USA as proposed by Julia Ward How in 1870, a few years after the end of the Civil War. The Mother's Day Proclamation she proposed, and which was adopted by somebody official was this:

Mother's Day Proclamation:

"Arise then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

"Say firmly": 'We will not have questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us reeking of carnage for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience. We women of one country will be too tender to those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own, it says "Disarm! Disarm!" The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession.'

"As men have forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can

live in peace, each bearing after his time the sacred impress not of Caesar, but of God.

"In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace."

If we were still celebrating Mother's Day as she proposed it we would have to call it "Mother's Unite for Peace Day" But over the years the day has been watered down, the life has been sucked right out of it. Mother's Day as a day to be radical activists for peace? That would be a day worth celebrating. Quite frankly, I came across this text for the proclamation for Mother's Day while I was preparing this sermon. It was news to me. Maybe next year, instead of using Mother's Day to have First Communion, we should use Mother's Day to organize a peace march.

Which actually serves as a good reminder: We do well to remember that while the actual day of one's First Communion involves pretty white suits and dresses – we should not let ourselves be fooled. Being a Christian is not about sitting quietly in a pretty room dappled with sunlight through stained glass. Being a Christian is about being in the world. Let's not ever let the life be sucked out of the call to follow Jesus. It is a call to radical activism. To work for the Kingdom of God is to work for peace, justice, equality; to break down barriers between peoples and to seek reconciliation between nations.

Don't let yourself be fooled. Communion is not just a meal to make us feel better about ourselves. It is a means of grace. It is physical manifestation of the forgiveness of sins that is ours through Christ's death. It is also a means of radical community, a meal where all are welcome. And it is heavenly food, to feed us for the work of serving God. I sometimes think we can think of it as battle rations, (MRE's) to strengthen us for what it takes to truly live out God's ways in the world.

It's not easy, it's never easy to do what God wants instead of what the world wants. We need strength, We need God's presence. And we have it. Stretch out your hand. Receive the bread of life. Drink from the cup of salvation. Be strengthened to stand up and walk. Be strengthened to go out into the world and do what you can to serve the Kingdom of God. Amen.