

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

Year B, Proper 6

June 14, 2009

For the last two weeks I have been talking about *Spiritual Formation*. I have contended that the furtherance of *Spiritual Formation* lies at the heart of the Church's call to serve as a sign to all people of the continuing presence of the Divine in our midst. I have asked you to *trust* our Lord enough to *embrace* the mystery of our faith and follow that mystery, wherever it leads us. To do that I have said that we must *nurture* our relationship with God, which is another way of saying we must *grow* spiritually. And, finally, I have tried to connect all of this to our desire to continue Jesus' work in our own day and time. All of this is, I realize, a *tall, tall order*.

If that were not the case I doubt that we would be here today. We are not the first people who have wanted this world to be a better place. We are not the first people who have recognized need and have tried to do what we can to respond to that need. Many before us have recognized injustice, abuse, pain and suffering and have tried just as hard as we to overpower these myriad manifestations of evil. I am hardly the first person to ever stand before a group of folk and say that the answer to all of this is to be found in our faith. Shortly after the days of Adam and Eve, God found it necessary to reiterate this truth. God's best know messengers were those we refer to as *the prophets*.

The principal among them being our Lord and Savior, Jesus. In Jesus we had/have a *prophet* who, literally, come down from heaven to, figuratively, raise us up to His level. His call – *trust in the Lord your God*

and all these things will be given unto you. In other words, *embrace* the mystery of our faith, *nurture* our relationship with the Holy or *grow spiritually* and we will discover all that we need to *be* the followers of Jesus we strive to be. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Unfortunately, sounding *simple enough* does not always translate smoothly into action. It has sounded *simple enough* to generation after generation of people just as committed as we and still need and evil continue to abound.

From time to time we attribute this to our *lack of faith* or our *lack of commitment*. If what needs to be done is not getting done, then the problem must be us. Again, it sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Yet, again, I am afraid it misses the point. By placing responsibility on ourselves for what we view as *our failure*, we are inferring that when we are *successful*, it is because of **our** efforts. All of which seems, to me, to put **us** at the center of everything **and** leave the source of what we truly need on the sidelines. And isn't that a mistake? In fact, is not it the very mistake that has plagued humanity since Day 1? Is not all of history a continuing sequence of humanity's efforts to *go it alone*?

Earlier this week I read a quote that offers another option. In effect, it takes the *load* off of our shoulders and, in fact, reminds us of those famous words of Jesus – *Come to me all you that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.* Consider,

*Our relationship to Christ is due (not to us but) to the **work of Christ**. We are Christians because somehow, some way, God has reached out to us, in Christ, our name has been “called” and we have been summoned forth to follow the way of the Good News. In countless ways God reaches*

*out to us, calls our name, summons us, scattering
among us words of vocational grace.*

In other words, we are the **tools** that God uses to continue the work of Jesus in our world.

In today's parable from the *Gospel of Mark* this point is made in the agrarian terms of a farmer who scatters seeds all about. We are then told that the farmer goes about his normal life and has no idea why some seed sprout and flourish, while others never take hold. The implication is that God has used the farmer to scatter the seed and eventually harvest the crop. Yet there is no indication that the farmer is *responsible* for the growth of the seeds. God has taken care of that. So it is with us, when we are willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit in our efforts to *be God's Body* in this world. The story is told of a Baptist preacher, who took off a few months to travel around the country.

Each Sunday he would go to a different church, in a different town and listen to a different sermon. When he got back home, one of his friends asked, "What did you learn about preaching during your sabbatical?" The preacher thought for a minute and finally said, "I learned that when it comes to preaching, if anybody hears anything in a sermon, it is nothing less than a miracle. It is like the seed that is randomly thrown on the ground. Some sprouts, but most does not. We can never completely understand why. In fact, that any grows is, for me, nothing less than miraculous." Take this very gathering for example.

We are sitting here on a glorious Sunday morning. Each and every one of you could easily be somewhere else. Truth be known, your mind, from time to time, is wandering, thinking about all those things you'll be doing when you leave here. And yet, miracle of miracles, wonder of

wonders, many of you will hear something this morning that will stick with you. It may be something from the words of *Scripture* we read; maybe even something from this sermon. It could be one of the prayers or it may come to you in the breaking of the bread. The point is your name *will be called* and something in you will rise and soar as you experience the presence of Holy One.

Jesus says it is like that when we open our hearts and soul to the Divine presence. It is like that when we *nurture* our relationship with our Creator. It is like that when we *embrace* the mystery of our faith and allow it to *transform* who we are and how we experience the world we live in. It is like that when we allow Christ to *form our spirit* in the likeness of His Spirit. That is what happens when “true” *Spiritual Formation* takes place in our lives. We are “reformed” into new images of our Lord and we are empowered to continue to do His work. It’s not all up to us; in fact, our part really is *simple*, when we let it be.