

WILDERNESS WORDS

Editors

If there is anything that you would like to have included in the Newsletter: 313-673-6519 and dmc@chem.wayne.edu or pcoleman@chem.wayne.edu

This Sunday:

Leading: Beth
Preaching: Carolyn
Presiding:
Coffee Hour:

Readings this week:

Fourth Sunday in Advent
18 December, 2016

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Epistle: Romans 1:1-7

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

(Click on citation to link directly to the reading.)



Reflections:

By Karen Halbersleben



*Inviting Mystery, Embracing
Compassion, Encountering Christ.*

Throughout my charmed childhood, Christmastime seemed a time of pure happiness: gathering with loved ones, wonderful smells emanating from Mom's kitchen, cavorting in winter's endless snowfalls, all those glorious presents waiting under the tree. The passage of years, of course, tinges Christmas happiness with loss and longing. The season focuses the heart on loved ones no longer at the table, on the legion of needy in our midst, on all the brokenness in our country and in our world.

Christmastime this year at Spirit of the Wilderness seems particularly poignant as, individually and as a congregation, we grapple with Stephen Ashcroft's end-of-life. We are called to celebrate the birth of one child, while another is taken from us. We sing of "tidings of comfort and joy" when the words we have to offer to Mary Ellen and to each other seem wretchedly inadequate.

I guess that this Christmas, for me at least, will be less about the baby Jesus, and more about the mother Mary. That young and questing Mary: recipient of so many miracles; giver of Life. It's hard this year not to feel the heart wrench with the knowledge that that same mother will be called to cradle her Son in death.

I stand in front of the Baby in the manger this Christmastide, recalling the innocent happiness of my own childhood. I stand in front of the Mother at that manger, newly delivered of the Son she would adore even unto death. And, I stand newly aware that in glimpsing the love of Mother for Son, I am in the presence of God. And of a love that endureth all things and will last forever...

Forums: 2016 - 2017

Forums — we grab our coffee and treats and spend an hour learning.

Jan. — Immigration

Feb. — Sacraments

March — Arts and social change

April — The Ten Commandments

May — Prayer.

Notes:

1.) Our **Christmas Eve** service will begin at 5:30pm **Christmas Day**, as normal, at 10:30am

2.) **Post Election Gathering for Solidarity, Hope, & Action.** (Shalom) All are welcome to gather for a potluck, **Dec. 12th, 5:30 PM at Kennedy's house**. We will share food and conversation to kindle hope and inspire action. Contact Beth for further information.

3.) **Tuesday, December 13th, Ruby's Pantry.**



4.) **Shower for Sarah & Kyle. Sunday, Jan. 29th** at Solbakken. Save the date!

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Editors' Note: Today we lost one of our best friends, our retired Detroit Priest, who, along with his wife Tish for many years enjoyed the solitude of our Lodge Harriett on Clearwater Lake. Erv was part of Spirit of the Wilderness from the beginning, often assisting and occasionally giving sermons. He was passionate about our little Episcopal corner. As we deal with his death, and simultaneously the struggles of Steve, Anna, Mary Ellen, and the entire Ashcroft extended family, we found the words of Erv's 'Final Sermon' to be comforting. So we share them here:

From his son Paul Brown: We received the news this morning that my father died sometime last night. He began hospice treatment yesterday at Augsburg Village in Baltimore, the community where he and my mother have lived the last two years, and had been in a slow decline the last few months. That decline became more precipitous the last few weeks and his death, while sad and painful to us, was a blessing in that it ended his pain and the family's uncertainty. My mom, despite Parkinson's, has been very strong and engaged. Please keep her and the rest of my family in your prayers. At this point, we plan to have a memorial service in Baltimore sometime after the New Year.



My father wrote his last sermon this summer, after a 50-year career as an Episcopal clergyman, on what it meant to live with a serious illness. This spirit guided him these last few years and is a comfort to us now that he is gone. This is who he was, and what he did. He was one of the good ones... Thanks, everyone.

June 6, 2016 – The Rev. Ervin Brown

The Power of Compassion 6/5/16

Thirteen years ago, in 2003, one year after I retired, I was diagnosed with bladder cancer. After two years of ineffective treatment, it was determined that the cancer had spread. Bladder removal and six months of chemo followed – and that seemed to be it. "You might get cancer," the oncologist said, "but it won't be this one." Wrong.

After 10 years it did come back, almost exactly one year ago, resulting in the removal of a kidney. The prognosis was not as chirpy this time, and last week, after my quarterly CT scan, it was back again, involving the other kidney.

I'm running out of organs!

But there was some hopeful news. The latest thing in cancer treatment seems to be immunotherapy, drugs targeted to specific cancers, enabling your immune system to fight the cancer, rather than administering radiation or chemo, both of which have much more toxic effects. The FDA approved my specific drug one week before, enabling me to begin infusions next week.

OK, why am I telling you all this?

This is supposed to be a sermon, not a medical report. And what's more boring than hearing about other people's ailments?

There's a whole school of thought that sermons should not be about personal experiences but more about theological concepts. By the way, I don't agree with that. Nothing induces sleep more quickly than a string of theological concepts with no personal allusions. I'm preaching this sermon because this experience I'm going through is not only deeply personal, but also because you are my church family, and we have no reason to keep secrets.

Questions of illness and death have been very much on my mind lately, and I want to share them with you, my church family. So here goes.

It's always amazed me that when I have ideas floating around in my head and go to the appointed scripture lessons to start fashioning a sermon, lo and behold: The lessons are about those very ideas. Today is a good example.

The First Lesson tells about the prophet Elijah visiting a widow in a town called Zarephath, whose son became so ill that we are told that he had no breath left in him. Elijah responds to the widow's plea for help and cries out to God, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again."

And so it happens and the child is revived.

The Gospel passage sounds similar. In this case it is Jesus in a town called Nain who encounters another widow with a dead son. She has no husband and no other children. We are told that Jesus hears the woman's sorrow, touches the bier of her dead son, and says to the woman, "Do not weep," and to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you rise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak.

Of all the Gospels, Luke is by far the one most involved with healing and health. And the word used most often is "compassion." Not pity, but compassion. One of my professors at Virginia Seminary wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Luke and titled it "The Compassionate Christ." And that He is. Again, not pity, but compassion. Feeling "with" more than feeling "for."

Why do you suppose this is so? Is Jesus showing off with all those healing miracles? Is He exhibiting His power? I don't think so. It's more that Jesus is so full of passion and deep sympathy that the divine compassion just naturally flows in and through him. Two of the most beloved of the parables – the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son – both use the same Greek word for compassion: "and while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." And the other parable: "But a Samaritan, as journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine."

Time and again, Luke stresses the compassionate character of Jesus... and that compassionate nature is not only shown to Biblical characters, but also to us. And did you notice that this intense emotion is almost always accompanied by action?

The Good Samaritan binds up the broken man's wounds...
The father runs and embraces the Prodigal Son...
Jesus is moved to touch the bier and tell the dead man to live...
The divine compassion is poured out with such power that it can:
heal broken bodies...
heal broken spirits...
heal broken hearts...

Even though a “cure” doesn’t necessarily take place, healing does.
So what I pray for in the time ahead is the power of God’s compassionate love to infuse my life.

What I ask of you is not pity, but that you will pray with me that the power of God’s compassion will so fill my life that whatever happens, it will be OK.

Will you walk this journey with me?

—The Rev. Ervin Adams Brown, III
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