

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: Karen H.
Preaching: Mary Ellen
Presiding: Mary Ellen

Readings this week:

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany, 5 February, 2017

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12)

Psalm: Psalm 112:1-9 (10)

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16)

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

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



Reflections:

By Mary Ellen

Vicar's Reflection

“Tis an ill wind that blows no good,” my mother used to say. I found her statement confusing, but have come to see its truth:

almost nothing is so bad it doesn't bring good.



*Inviting Mystery, Embracing
 Compassion, Encountering Christ.*

I thought of that when I heard this morning that so many lawyers are volunteering their time, showing up at the airport to help refugees/immigrants terrified by the administration's edict. How wonderful—all these lawyers overwhelming the airport with their offers of aid for the most vulnerable!

This kind of response seems particularly profound in the light of some of our common lectionary readings these weeks of Epiphany. Because we have a Revised Common Lectionary, many members of the community—Lutherans, Congregationalists, Catholics, etc. are hearing with us readings that seem so clear-cut and eloquent. This last Sunday from Micah 6:8: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?”

Or in this week's lesson from Isaiah in which the prophet is speaking with God's voice, saying, (and I paraphrase) that people's 'fasting' is self-indulgent and means nothing; the real fast God wants is “to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (Isaiah 58: 1-12) Not a lot of fuzziness there!

Did these passages seem so stark, so clear, in other rounds of Epiphany, year A? I don't think so. Here we are—and not just us Episcopalians, but all our mainstream Christian brothers and sisters—hearing these powerful passages about what God demands, at a time when mercy, kindness, justice and humility seem to be in short supply.

Forums: 2016 - 2017

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

Feb. — Sacraments

March — Arts and social change

April — The Ten Commandments

May — Prayer.

These passages are powerful, and like prophetic messages are meant to—they give us a kick in the backside. I realize I’ve been too complacent, too willing to allow others to be involved, to apathetic to the world. If more and more of us realize this--deciding to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God as Micah tells us, or to break yokes, share bread, care for the homeless, and clothe the naked—who knows? Maybe my mom will be proved right again—“Tis an ill wind that blows no good.”

Art Show!!

Kindling Curiosity-- Lighting the Creative Spark

Opens March 24th, speaker to be confirmed. Closes April 9th.

Artists are drawn to places by a certain light, scenery, or wildness: these ignite their creative spark. Interviewed about their work, artists speak of sights or sounds that grabbed them and made them want to explore and express in clay, paint, glass, fiber, words, wax or photo.

That twinge of curiosity, that fire of wonder, that boggling paradox—what kindles this in you, pushing you toward expression? What lights your creative spark (here on the lake shore and in the north woods) pushing you to articulate and create?

Consider these questions as you make work to convey your kindling, your curiosity, your lighting, your creative spark, and that which engages it. Work to be dropped off at the Johnson Heritage Post by March 20th or 21st. Show opens March 24th, with a presentation.

Maximum 2 pieces per artist.

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SpiritoftheWilderness

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Notes:

1.) Care Center (after Church) this Sunday, Feb. 5th.

2.) Ruby Pantry, Tuesday, Feb. 14th.





Celebrating and thanksgiving for the completion of Larry and Marsha's cabin on Loon Lake.



Fascinating and provocative Forum presentation after Church by Brandon Law, Supervisor of the Grand Marais Border Patrol Station.

Baby Shower for Sarah & Kyle and Reese on Sunday. A great time was had by all. Thanks to Ginnie who was the prime organizer, Dave & Shawn Howe who graciously provided the beautiful venue at their Solbakken Lodge, and to all those who helped, cooked, donated diapers and gifts, and cheerfully hugged Reese and the Stover family.



Homily given by Paul Brown, son of Erv Brown, at his Memorial Service at Memorial Church in Baltimore, MD, on Jan. 7th. Erv and Tish loved their annual time, for over 30 years at Clearwater Lake, and their association with the Spirit of the Wilderness:

Good afternoon! It is very uplifting to see so many people from the various chapters of my family's life here today. On behalf of my mother, my sisters Laura and Holly, my aunt Nell Charlton, and all the members of our family, I'd like to thank everyone for being here to celebrate my father's incredible life.

A special thanks to the parishioners and leadership of Memorial Church for being such an important part of my parent's lives these last few years, especially the wonderful Partners in Care Ministry that has been so attentive to Mom and Dad recently. My sisters and I refer to Bill Roberts in particular as "Saint William." He has certainly performed at least two requirements for canonization: being a servant of God, and living a life of heroic virtue. I think that a third requirement, performing miracles, is supposed to be posthumous but Bill's ability to navigate the complex dynamics of my family, in this life, is certainly miraculous, and a great blessing to us.

Family and friends who have been around me the last 15 years know that I'm a big fan of the band Drive-By Truckers. The Truckers are what's loosely called an alternative southern rock band, based in Athens, Georgia but originally from north Alabama. They are an incredibly talented, dynamic group, rife with paradoxes, writers of lyrics in the southern gothic tradition of Flannery O' Connor and Truman Capote but modern and progressive in their politics. Their first album to catch my attention was an homage to the southern rock legends Lynrd Skynrd but also an exploration of what it meant to be southerners who loved the south but were troubled by its legacy of racial discrimination and oppression. The Truckers call this the "Duality of the Southern Thing", or "Thang", in lead singer Patterson Hood's north Alabama twang. It is the perspective of people who grew up in the south, love their family and friends, but who left the south for some period of time, maybe permanently, resolved to never give up their southernness, but also to never accept that the injustices that they knew are normal, nor are they unique to the South, either. I really love the Truckers for their music, but what has most resonated with me is that I saw so much of my father's life experiences in their lyrics, and what they stand for.

My Dad spent the first 21 years of his life in Alabama, with a father who was very much a man of his time and place, from what I've been told. A gregarious salesman and sportsman, a hale fellow well met, my grandfather was friends with the notorious police chief of Birmingham, Bull Connor, and he took my Dad to see Strom Thurmond accept the Presidential nomination of the Dixiecrat Party at its' 1948 Convention in Birmingham. I've long wondered what ended up making my father into someone who did not himself become a man of his time and place in Birmingham, yet someone who was unmistakably southern. What was the source of his own duality?

My father told me that his personal epiphany, his spark of awareness on racial discrimination, came one day when he was a child riding a city bus in Birmingham and a black woman with young children got on board, grocery bags in both hands, and struggled past him seated in one of the front rows, on her way to sit in the back of the bus. Something so simple, so unfair, but why him, why then? I don't know, but it changed him forever.

Dad also told the story of Autherine Lucy, the young black woman who had been admitted by clerical error to the University of Alabama in the mid-1950s while he was a student there. In the few days she was on campus before being forced to withdraw, Dad saw an angry mob descend on her as she was being escorted to class by the school's Episcopal chaplain, who was beaten in the process. Dad said that this act of personal heroism by both of them was, in part, what inspired him, raised Methodist, to become an Episcopalian and later a member of the clergy. Despite this experience in Tuscaloosa, and the memory it seared in him, my father became a campus leader in more traditional collegiate ways, including president of his fraternity, a star student, and, always, a fan of the Alabama football team.

I don't think this duality, or ambivalence, ever paralyzed my father. It did sadden him somewhat in that he felt that he could never really go home again. And he didn't go back, really, other than for family visits and gatherings. It did call him to action, to a calling. I think he found in the Episcopal Church, committed to both tradition and social justice, a comfortable place to work through this duality. His call to action was to love and be loyal to his family, to minister to his fellow man and to be in the arena, to love history and learning, and to never accept any injustice, large or small.

And, sometimes, the injustices were, well, quite small. My Dad was never patient with bad or, more importantly, disrespectful service at a restaurant, store, or any other context. Some of this might have been good old fashioned Scotch-Irish cussedness, like the time when my sisters and I were young children and on a family car trip we stopped for dinner at a Howard Johnson's restaurant. A rude waitress, despite my father's pleas for a simple grilled cheese for one of us kids, brought out two pieces of untoasted white bread with a slab of cold cheese in the middle which was slammed down on the table. I don't remember this, because I was too young, but apparently we three kids were gently encouraged to throw mash potatoes with gravy on the walls around our booth. We forever lived in fear of bad or rude service and the reactions it evoked.

But sometimes it wasn't small, or trivial. When I was seven years old in the summer of 1972, my father was asked to officiate at a cousin's wedding in southern Georgia. The day of the wedding, I was in the hotel pool where we were staying with some of my local cousins when a couple of black children who were also hotel guests got into the pool. At the time, we were living in Baltimore and I attended an integrated YMCA summer camp and thought nothing of it. But my cousins were told to get out of the water and my father was scolded by some of his relatives for letting me stay in the water. Dad did not yield. And in the course of an argument, my father proudly told me later, his sister, my Aunt Nell, when asked why I hadn't gotten out of the water, replied that "he hasn't been taught to hate yet."

The spark of awareness, the intolerance of injustice, continued to light Dad's life and career the rest of his days. From their travels to the Middle East, my parents became champions of the Palestinian people, seeing in them a humanity that often gets lost in the violence and political discord. From family experience, they became advocates for the rights of gays and lesbians. In 1992, the Episcopal Bishop of Southeastern Michigan asked Dad to perform the first civil ceremony for a gay couple in the Diocese. And he accepted, at the time a controversial step on both of their parts. Ironically, and sadly, for him, the most vocal opposition within his own church came from some minority parishioners.

Probably the most southern aspect of my father's personality was his sense of humor and his love of storytelling. He had a rich vein of material to work with from his childhood, with a colorful mother who had grown up in South Alabama where she soaked up a dictionary of small-town southern colloquialisms. Growing up, we were told the stories of Alabama relatives with names such as Aint Hun, Mama Lou, Duck Mama, and an old country physician named Doctor Fudge. Dad loved to sip bourbon or, later in life, scotch, and tell stories, like the one of a family car trip to northern Florida when, stopped on a causeway over a river with the car window rolled down, he saw two women fishing. One young woman pulled a small fish from the water and her companion, eyeing it dismissively, said "Shoot, Lerlene, that one ain't big enough to stank up the grease," a phrase that is now part of family lexicon.

As an Episcopal priest, he certainly didn't lack for good material, either, especially from some of the wealthier and more eccentric stops along the way. In Ruxton and Glyndon, outside of Baltimore, he did everything from bless the hounds before Thanksgiving fox hunts; get asked to perform the funeral of the famous stallion, Native Dancer; pay pastoral visits to the curmudgeonly poet Ogden Nash in his dying days; attend cocktail parties with people such as President Eisenhower's brother and members of the Maryland landed gentry; and perform the funeral of our family friend and neighbor, the talented and fantastically interesting niece of President Taft. Pretty heady stuff for a young priest from Alabama barely out of his 20s.

In his next parish in Lynchburg, he was forever vexed by an octogenarian doctor's widow and parishioner who, every Sunday, no matter the weather, would slowly march, hunched over, nearly three miles from her home to our downtown church. My Dad's reward for her faithful attendance was that she would inevitably sleep, loudly and slightly listing, and nearly directly in front of the pulpit, for the entirety of his sermons. Once when he made a pastoral call to her home, she graciously served him deviled ham sandwiches which, in reality, were cat food sandwiches because she had mistakenly opened the wrong can in the kitchen. My father, a southern gentleman, ate uncomplainingly. A painting of this wonderful woman, hunched over, walking up one of Lynchburg's steep hills, hung in his office for the rest of his career after leaving Lynchburg.

Although he treasured memories of every church to which he'd been called, there was a special room in his heart for the diverse places like Christ Church, Detroit, a community much like Memorial. My family, especially my father, were warmly embraced, hugged, squeezed, and fed, and fed, by the large Syrian population at Christ Church. I have fond memories, other than the three days I spent in the hospital after eating some funky grapes, of the trip I took with my father in 1987 to Syria and the Holy Land, in part to visit the ancestral villages of a number of my Dad's Syrian-American parishioners. As a downtown parish in an economically-troubled big city, Christ Church had more than its share of broken people come through its doors seeking help. But the people of Detroit, Christ Church in particular, were grounded, unpretentious, and positive-spirited, qualities that left a permanent mark on all of my family. And there were characters, too. Like Alvin, a homeless World War Two Navy veteran who attended church regularly and would insert himself into the church processions, hands raised as if he were giving a benediction, monotonically humming "The Girls of Jones Beach" as he slowly shuffled up the aisle. Convinced that Alvin had PTSD, Dad once asked him where he was during the War. To which Alvin deadpanned, "in a rooming house in Long Beach..."

The last years of Dad's career saw him return to Maryland, which, situated roughly halfway between my mother's home state of New York and Alabama, was a place where both my parents felt at home. John Kennedy famously referred to Washington, DC as a place of northern charm and southern efficiency. I think Baltimore, to my family, has been a town of northern grit and southern warmth, a moderate, welcoming place with a few dashes of eccentricity thrown in. Dad's last full time job in parish ministry was in St. Michael's, a beautiful, bucolic harbor town on the Eastern Shore. When my parents decided to retire from St. Michael's to Butcher's Hill in inner city Baltimore, my sisters and I gently reminded them that most people their age went the other way. But they loved the symphony, the theater, and, most importantly, the friends they had made from two previous Baltimore sojourns, and this became home once again, and still is.

I think storytelling, the southern gift for gab was, in part, what attracted my mother to my Dad when they met in graduate school in 1959. My mother, no-nonsense, stoic, and independent, as many of you know, grew up in a Dutch farming family in upstate New York. But her father was also a southerner, a reverse carpetbagger from North Carolina who left the south to attend Cornell and later married into the family and became a farmer. My grandfather had charming younger brothers who would spend summers working on the farm when my mother was little. I'm sure she saw some of those North Carolinians in my father. Despite their different backgrounds, my Dad was always warmly welcomed in her family. But there were differences.

Dad liked to tell the story of his first visit to the family farm after he and Mom became engaged. After dinner his first night there, everyone gathered in the living room to watch TV. A few minutes into the show, Dad looked around the room and every single member of my mother's large family was sound asleep in their chairs, not long after 7 p.m., probably because they had been up since four a.m. to do the morning milking. My father was caring and nurturing with animals, including the various pets we had over the years. For my mother, if it couldn't be eaten, milked, ridden, or worked, an animal was superfluous.

My father officiated at many of my mother's family's weddings and was often called upon to offer a blessing or benediction at a family gathering. A couple of years ago, my cousin had an engagement party which I, and most of my mother's family, attended but which my parents couldn't. Shortly before we gathered for lunch, I was asked to say the opening prayer. I thought to myself, well, this is a pretty sad state of affairs that the most pious person this family could come up with in a group of over a hundred people was a Washington lobbyist, but I realized that this was a reflection more of my Dad, than me, and it was an honor to be associated with him, even if I know I didn't measure up to him.

The truth is, as a preacher's kid, you always measure yourself against your parent, and you're measured by others. When I was very young, I was kind of intimidated by my Dad, this man, this divine presence, who wore these flowing vestments and stood, somewhat imperiously, in a pulpit and looked down on you in church. He could deliver an incredibly eloquent sermon, but my father's Christianity was best demonstrated by his example, not his words. I never felt that my sisters or I were judged, just loved, but if I ever asked a theologically errant or clueless question, he would lower his head, shake it, laugh, and decry that he had raised a biblical illiterate. I don't think that I feared disappointing him, but I disappointed myself if I did something that I thought didn't live up to his example.

I was a typical knucklehead teenager, and my sisters and I did everything we could to fulfill the stereotype of the rebellious preacher's kids. Well, my sisters did more than me, although there was this one time when I was 16 and I was in the front seat of a Lynchburg police car after a joy ride with some friends. The police car was parked right in front of our house, where I had ended up with my friends, and the cop who had followed us, because my parents were out for the evening with another clergy couple and we were going to our house to party. All of the sudden, I looked across Rivermont Avenue and saw my parents and their friends getting out of their car. I still can't figure out why both my father and his clergy friend were wearing clerical collars on a summer weeknight, and I don't know who was more surprised: my dad and his friend seeing me in the front seat of a cop car, or the Lynchburg cop seeing two priests approach his car. It was truly a divine intervention as the cop told us after we went inside that he would have taken me downtown if my Dad hadn't shown up.

I'll close by saying a little about the last few months. As we've all heard recently, almost to the point of cliché, 2016 was a pretty crappy year for a lot of people. We lost some great people, everyone from Muhammad Ali, to Leonard Cohen, Prince, Carrie Fischer, David Bowie, John Glenn, even Florence Henderson. Other than Senator Glenn, these are people who I didn't know except as indelible media images from my childhood and young adulthood. But there's been a lot of loss, and that sense of loss is on a lot of people's minds. My Dad was pretty out of it the last couple months of his life so I hope that he wasn't too aware of the ugly spirit that visited the country in the wake of the November elections. I feel blessed and relieved that he didn't suffer for a long time, but I'm also grateful that the way he was the last months of his life were not what I will remember him for. There is so much more to remember, and I've been the most emotional in the weeks since his death when I hear others tell stories about him.

What I hear from them, what I know, is that my Dad deeply believed in the God-given humanity of every person. It violated every fiber of his belief to know that a person was excluded or oppressed simply because of who they were at birth. That didn't mean that he liked everyone he met. He didn't, especially those who used their own God-given humanity to deny or repress the humanity of others. And, well, he didn't much care for Auburn fans, not including family...

But he gave everyone a chance, and if they were loving, open-minded, told a good story or a funny joke - especially over a bourbon or a scotch- he knew you were a kindred spirit. In this season of Epiphany, I pray that his spark, his example, is something we can all connect with and take with us in the days and years ahead.