

The Second Sunday of Lent

March 4, 2007

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What if the sum total of your knowledge about the Episcopal Church was based on what you read in the newspaper or saw on television news? What would you think about the church?

A few words like “fractured, divided, in disarray” do come to mind. Moreover, I think you would really believe that we are all consumed with issues, one issue in particular, and that our entire life as a church community depended on the decisions and actions of people far remote from Christ Church Valdosta. Is that a fair description? Is it accurate?

Look around and see the people in our pews, all sorts of people with all sorts of backgrounds and opinions on all sorts of things. Are we all in agreement about everything? Is our life driven by issues? Believe me, the answer to all those questions is “Absolutely not!” Do we serve Jesus, are we His Body here in this city? I think so.

I suppose we could call that image of us that seems to dominate the media “bad press.” I suppose they see and hear only the angry and the disaffected, the ones with issues of their own that they press upon others, the ones with an overwhelming need to be in control. Such

people make it all so simple, and the media just loves simple, black and white, yes and no stories. They sell.

You know who else received “bad press?” Pharisees. Of course some Pharisees deserved it. Some differed not at all from the news makers of today. It is so easy to dismiss them all as enemies of Jesus, but what about the ones in the Gospel this morning? Here they come to warn Jesus about the designs of Herod. Why on earth would they care? What possible common cause could they have with this Galilean Rabbi who seems to challenge everything they have ever heard?

The common cause, for them and for us, is the Kingdom of God. The Pharisees long for it; Jesus proclaims it. Beyond all their reservations about this charismatic Jesus, they see the possibility that He is right, that it is true, the Kingdom is at hand, and they can put aside everything else to save the one who heralds it.

Who is the enemy for them? It’s not Jesus. The common enemy of Jesus and the Pharisees is Herod. Herod represents power and control, not the control exercised by a loving God for His people but control based on coercing power. Herod is offensive to both the Law, the Pharisees, and to the Prophets, to Jesus. Herod is bent on control based on nothing more than his own self-interest, his self-importance, and is perfectly willing to sacrifice both the Pharisees and Jesus and perhaps the Kingdom of God to get it.

At least some of those Pharisees can see that. Some have their eyes open to both the threat of earthly power, the inevitable tyrannical end of the path of Herod, and divine intervention embodied in Jesus. So they warn the one who brings the divine very close. That took courage. It was, and is, far easier to see that as someone else’s task, someone else’s risk, and to allow the Herods of this world to seize and hold the center of attention. It’s not hard to get the attention of the world if you’re loud enough. If you can touch on pride and politics,

you are assured of a following in this world; it's an age-old proven formula and works as well today as it did for Herod.

Jesus relies on neither. Jesus simply proclaims that the love and compassion of God will, and do, triumph over all the schemes and devices of humanity.

There is a kindness in the reply of Jesus to those who gave Him warning; the answer isn't a puzzle. Jesus tells them, and He tells us, that they and we must never lose heart, never doubt, that the Kingdom of God is here. "Three days," from apparent defeat to eternal triumph, a very short time in the grand scale of things.

That's the message to you and to me in this Gospel. Never lose sight of who we are, a community formed in the image of Jesus Christ, and why we are here, to worship and to serve.

In His Holy Name.