

SERMON, 25 AUGUST 2019

JEREMIAH 1: 4 – 10

PSALM 103: 1 – 8

HEBREWS 12: 18 – 29

LUKE 13: 10 – 17

IN the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Do you remember Presiding Bishop John Allin? Probably not; it has been a long time

Speaking of a long time ago, I was ordained Deacon in 1982 and went to seminary at Nashotah House in Wisconsin in 1984.

I met quite a few significant church people because I was the only deacon at the “house” for several years. One of those significant people was John Allin.

He was there as a speaker for some dedication that I can’t remember. Someone had the idea that the eucharist should be celebrated out of doors on the lawn with Lake Nashotah for a really- nice backdrop for the altar for the bishop’s celebration. It also provided space for the very large congregation they anticipated’

It really was beautiful. It was a perfect, sunny Spring day with a light, gentle breeze. The altar faced rows of chairs filled with seminarians and faculty and all sorts of guests. It really was a large congregation

Apparently, it was also a beautiful, perfect Spring day for some sort of bees that lived underground in that part of Wisconsin. They all emerged at once. They were not the congregation anticipated. Fortunately, they were a species that does not sting, at least not at a religious celebration in the presence of a Presiding Bishop.

Somewhere we have a newspaper clipping of the event. The bishop and I are facing the camera; he is elevating the paten and I the chalice. We are covered by little specks that look like faults in the photo; they aren't faults, they are bees.

The bees were strangely drawn to the altar or, perhaps, the wine. The bishop used the corner of the purificator to flip the bees out of the wine in the chalice. They would land on the fair linen, stagger around for a minute or two, and fly away, quite happy.

Well trained, I remained quite still until a bee walked between my glasses and my eyes, which may be why I remember it all so clearly.

I also have a very clear memory of what Bishop Allin said to that somewhat distracted congregation.

He said that in his experience as a bishop he had 'loved the church' more than he had "loved Jesus." It brings us to today's Gospel reading from Luke.

It's a two- part story. In the first part there is a woman who had suffered from the "spirit of infirmity" for eighteen years, who was miraculously healed by the presence and touch of Jesus. She had been bent over, unable to straighten herself. She only looked down

But it happened in the synagogue or temple and it was the Sabbath. The ruler of the synagogue was indignant that such a thing should happen at such a place and such a time. He said that if you must be healed there are six other perfectly adequate days in a week; use one of those.

It's all very simple if we accept it as such. But, perhaps, Luke, or some later writer, has given us a deeper, broader story.

Suppose that the bent-over woman is the church, one of the early communities of Christians who only look down at what "has been," unable to see the continuing presence of Jesus in "what is." They are bound by a "spirit of infirmity" that tells them they are powerless.

It is the presence, the touch of Jesus that brings them to see not only what they might be but, looking up, what they will be.

As Jesus says, the church is 'loosed' from the bonds of looking downward, looking inward.

If the woman represents the church, who is the ruler of the synagogue? I suppose in some ways he too is the church but of a very different persuasion. He would prefer that everything be just as it had always been.

In his mind the "Law," the absolute obedience to traditions would maintain the purity of Israel. He sees Jesus as a threat to the state. He sees the church, if it is no more bound by infirmity, as a threat to his traditions.

The great tradition for him is the tradition that had left the woman, left the church, bent and looking downward lost in the past and afraid of the future.

Jesus poses a threat because he puts human need before ritual requirements.

Bishop Allin was familiar with a church that is both the the woman who has been healed and has seen the church at it is to be and the ruler of the synagogue immersed in what had been.

His closing statement was Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" It is a question posed to us today and every day. Do we love only what has been or do we love what is and what will be.

"That" he said, "Is the final examination for us all."

In His Holy Name