

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

2 Pentecost  
May 25, 2008  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Hear With Your Heart”**

Today is the second Sunday of Pentecost. It is the season of the church; the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus is over and the Apostles now disperse into the world to bring Christ's teaching to all peoples. They carry with them the words and teachings of Jesus. Those words were still fresh in their minds, even though, not one word of the Gospels had yet been written. They went out to teach and to convert others to salvation, because Jesus had instructed them to do so with his words: “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Each week we read that self same Gospel in this church building. Each week we listen and hear Christ's words. They are only words until the moment we decide that they belong to us. Some people never get to that level of understanding. The words remain Christ's words that they hear, but only hear, and they remain lying on the pages totally devoid of life.

At the end of the service the priest says: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!” What he means by that is that we go out from this church building carrying with us Christ's Gospel words and through our actions, work, encounters and verbally by what we say: we teach others about Jesus.

Can you imagine going up to anyone at work or in the street and saying to them: “I want to talk to you about Jesus?” Would you ever contemplate sharing today's Gospel with a stranger or even with a friend? Would you walk into Bon Secours hospital in Port Jervis, and arriving in room 317, tell the woman in bed 2: “Have I got news for you. Because today, this very morning, Jesus told me in his Gospel; do not worry about your life, for God will give you what you truly need. You may feel bad at this moment, you may feel pain, but God who looks after the smallest sparrow, will care for you also. So do not worry about tomorrow, God will take care of tomorrow and he will take care of you.”

We all know these words to be true. We know that God will take care of us, but still we worry about ourselves and we worry about things we know we cannot control. So why are we reluctant to tell others: “Listen I am a Christian, and I have news for you.” Is it because we have listened to the words with our ears, when we should have been writing them on our hearts?”

Because when we write Christ's words and his teaching on our hearts they transfer to other people, when we show them love.

Have you heard that before? Have you thought: “Oh I have read that somewhere, but I cannot remember where?”

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The answer is that you have heard it before in sermon after sermon. You can still read about that kind of spirituality on the parish website. You heard it during the Parish Project, “Our True Story”. You heard it again in our Parish Lenten Prayer discussions. It is the difference between “living the word” and merely “hearing the word.”

At the end of this month we as a parish and as a church will have spent \$100,000 on improvements to this facility during the five years course of this ministry. None of that money on property and maintenance includes the new Pipe Organ, but equally none of that change is what this ministry is about. This ministry is about the deepening of our sacramental life and our relationship with God in all that we do.

We have not expanded our outreaches because we are merely interested in social justice or change. We have increased our spiritual programs; because everything we have taught and learned in the last five years have led us back to the Bible and to the Word of God. Being a church and a people of the Word, calls each of us to be witnesses to the Gospel, individually and collectively. That demands that we come to church with a different attitude, than ever before. Christ commands us to come and say: “What can I do to further the Gospel today? How can I spread the teaching and influence of Christ in my town, in my area, in my work and in my life?” In order to do that, you must listen and inscribe Christ’s teaching on your heart. *In order to do that you have got to come to church.*

“Can I not stay at home and read my Bible?” you might well ask. “Of course you can.” And I have fourteen shut-ins who are forced to do that Sunday after Sunday. They would love to come to church and feel the warmth and strength of this Body of Christ around them. But if you do, then you must remember that this body is committed to growing spiritually, theologically and weekly to grow in worship. If all you notice are the physical changes in this church and facility, then you must also know that you have not belonged to this spiritual program and you no longer know why we do what we do.

There is a temptation when you are out of the loop for so long, to no longer feel apart of it, and to harken back to ‘good old days’ where you were. Suddenly it’s the priest’s fault or it’s the Vestry’s fault or you feel this is ‘not the church I joined all those years ago’. If you think that, you are absolutely right. This is not the church you joined and yes it is the priest’s fault and it is the Vestry’s fault. It is the fault of all those who left their warm cozy homes in the dark of a February night to participate in Lenten discussion and prayer groups. It is the fault of all those who joined in the Parish Program, ‘Our True Story’ and in a six month period developed a new vision and plan for the parish.

It is the fault of the Vestry who voted to take that vision and run with it, as ‘shared ministry’. It is the fault of the Gospel that calls each one of us to grow spiritually and in the love of God.

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But if there is one person who is truly guilty of making you feel that everything is changing, then that person has to be Jesus Christ.

It is not the first time that he has done it. Two thousand years ago he made his own Jewish leaders and the whole of Judaism feel the exact same way. “Who does this man think he is?” they asked. “Does he not know that we have Abraham for our Father?” Two thousand years later, the same Jesus is still turning the world upside down. Two thousand years later Jesus is putting himself front and center in his church and telling us that his is a Gospel of change; it is a Gospel that demands that we change power for love, hatred for forgiveness, individual interest for the interest of the Gospel. That is the Gospel he has left us with.

If you feel lost, if you do feel alone, or disconnected, I invite you to a refresher course in the spiritual, vision and growth of our parish program. If you were away or the pressure of family, work and time, did not allow you to participate in any of the parish meetings, liturgies or group discussions, then you have the opportunity to join our Fall Program, the Parish Project II. It is a program that will double in educating and teaching everyone who would like to be received by Bishop Paul in late October. It teaches what it means to be an Episcopalian today in our post modern age. It is a program to help us grow. It will focus on our scripture, Bible roots and center on Jesus as our inspiration. It will invite you back to where Scripture and Bible study is an everyday experience in your life. It will invite you to bring prayer into your life. It will make you want to get up and run out into the street and tell the passing stranger: “Do you want to know about Jesus? Do you want to now because as sure as eggs are eggs I want to tell you.”

Already, it is creeping into our worship and liturgy. It makes the organist question, why he picks a particular hymn. It asks the choir “If you can sing the words then surely you can reach for your Bible and know why you are singing them.”

It calls for the rest of us to question what we bring to this Altar, and what we need to leave at the church door.

At the beginning of this sermon I asked you: “Would you walk into Bon Secours hospital, go to room 317 and tell the woman in bed 2, “do not worry about your life, because Jesus has taught us that God cares and loves each one of us”. Do you believe?

Well, there is one person who has been doing that from this church for many years. She is a Gospel person; she is a person of this Pentecost season. She is not afraid to tell others who the Lord of her life is. She has visited hospital and Senior Care and many a shut-in for many years. She may carry a Bible and her communion kit, but she truly needs neither, because she has Jesus’ words written on her heart, and she brings others into communion with this Body of Christ, because she is always here, to share the bread and drink the wine

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and go forth as her Christ instructed her to bring his love to others. She is our own Katherine Ruzanski. She is here, she is always here.

Today this church, this Vestry, this ministry and this congregation honors her and presents to her the tools of her trade, the instruments of her continued ministry and blesses them with the blessing of her church. In doing so we thank Katherine for the work she has done in this parish in the name of Jesus and we declare this “Katherine Ruzanski Day”

Presentation:

May God our Father bless this Bible and Communion set. In Jesus name and may they bring comfort and love to all who Katherine ministers to.

Amen+

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