

15 Pentecost
Fr. Bill McGinty
September 13, 2009

“The Inn on the Highway”

If there is one thing 9/11 and the destruction of the World Trade Center has taught us, it is the fragile nature of our existence here on earth. As we watched again those images on Friday of that terrible day it came flooding back to us how the greatest city in the world was suddenly brought to a halt by the evil of terrorism.

Trains, buses, planes and traffic simply stopped as police directed people north towards the George Washington Bridge and the opportunity of safety and a way off the island. People interviewed expressed feelings of powerlessness, outrage, helplessness and amazement. Eight years later, the same pictures rescued the same feelings.

Our first reading today, could have been written for and about those terrible few hours in Manhattan, but they weren't, they were written 3,000 years ago. They are about wisdom and about reading the signs of the times so accurately, that you know the right thing to do in any given instance.

9/11 came upon us so suddenly, that now we forgot how surprised and shocked we were. Watching the figures around the base of the towers, we find ourselves saying to ourselves, move away, move away, because at 9:58am and 10:35 am we know now what happens.

Stupid thoughts go through your mind watching the pictures such as: “If I had worked in the top floors I would have kept a parachute in my desk.” No I wouldn't. Nobody would. Nobody would ever have imaged an event so terrible. A deed so evil. A plan so hideous as to fly a plane into the workplace of thousands of innocent people.

In the face of true evil, none of us are wise; we revert to being mortal, fragile and extremely vulnerable.

As I watched the shots of people young and old, and of all walks of life, stream across the George Washington Bridge, it struck me that without their cars, suits and other distinguishing marks of wealth, they were now all the same. They

were now all the same. They were all people seeking to be safe. All seeking salvation. All looking to return home, to those they loved and more than glad that unlike many others on that day they were able to do so.

Salvation is the mission of the church. We exist to tell the story of Jesus and his ministry, why he came and what he offers to the world.

We do not exist for Episcopalians alone, but for everyone in our community, everyone passing, everyone in need of refuge, those in trouble and those lost and unable to find their way.

In many ways we are a Gospel Inn on the highway of life. As Lois and Linda will tell you each day, each ring of the doorbell brings something different. They receive request so bizarre that at times they are perplexed as to how to respond, but respond they do, to Food Pantry, Child Care, requests for sick calls, people dying and so much more. The church is a safe haven and a refuse and ER for many you make that possible by your stewardship.

I was thinking of this on Tuesday, because the Bishop was asking me how the summer had gone. And I had told him that this particular summer had been good and most Sundays we had good numbers at church.

“Well of course, you are a destination.” replied Bishop Paul, referring to Pike County, the Delaware and Milford as a tourist and recreational center that attracts people in the summer.

I hadn't really thought of us like that. I came away thinking it is nice to be referred to a 'destination.' The Gospel calls us to be a destination, that Inn on the road.

Like today's Gospel, we proclaim who Jesus is “You are the Messiah. The son of God. You are the Savior, the one who brings healing. You are the finder of the lost; you are a refuge from the storm.”

“A refuge” from the storm and his church, accurately describes Jesus in the days after 9/11. Records show that right across America people of all faiths flocked to churches. They wanted to pray and stand shoulder to shoulder with neighbors and friends. They wanted to know that there was an answer to the futility and stupidity of senseless death, and they wanted to honor those who stood for more than 'self' and were prepared to lay down their lives for the community and total strangers.

Jesus in the Gospel today states exactly what his mission is. His mission is to lay down his life that others might live. Jesus' words have resonated down the centuries such that laying down your life for another' has become synonymous with the greatest form of love.

In responding to Jesus' Gospel invitation to follow him, we know that our mission rarely calls for that sort of heroics. But as a witness to Jesus and his mission we are that "Inn on the highway" that seeks to bring Christ to others who need him in times of distress, brokenness and pain.

Wednesday night found me at Trinity Mount Pocono, at another meeting with the Bishop. The Congregational Development Committee looks at parishes in need of help, parishes in need, parishes in distress and parishes at risk of going out of existence.

One of the strong points that were made in the meeting was that parishes are not inexistence simply to care for themselves. There are a lighthouse of the Diocese that witness to the teaching of the Gospel and the church in a particular area and they have a moral obligation to maintain that presence in a healthy way for all who seek Christ's salvation. For every soul caught the storm of life.

In our second week of our stewardship campaign it is good to remember that we are a part of something much greater than ourselves. We belong to a church and a diocese with a distinct identity. It is one that cares about social justice, the poor and the blight of others.

It is one of my dreams to have the best church signs around our building that say: "This is an Episcopal church. We are here to bring Christ to those who need him and all are welcome."

As members of the diocese we contribute to a collective effort of being the Episcopal presence in this area. There is a sense in which this is our watch and the torch of the gospel has been passed to us. That is stewardship too.

I know that as we reflect over the next few weeks on our own stewardship why we are here and how we respond to the Gospel will play a large part in the way we feel about ourselves as a church.

Amen+