Fifth Sunday after Epiphany February 5, 2017

All Saints’ Church Year A

Isaiah 58:1-9a, [9b-12] I Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]

Psalm 112: 1-9[10] Matthew 5:13-20

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a Victorian poet, once wrote, “Earth is crammed with heaven. And every common bush afire with God.”

She is using poetry, sacramental language, to describe the experience of life. Heaven is everywhere. Be careful, you might trip over it if you’re not looking!

We believe this as Episcopalians. One thing that marks us as Episcopalians is our use of sacraments as the way to express the Kingdom of God as here and now. Baptism is a sacrament. The Eucharist, bread and wine, is a sacrament. Confirmation, Covenant of Marriage and Priesthood are sacraments. Anointing is a sacrament. Confession and Absolution is a sacrament. A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace. We believe that Grace is as real as the thing that carries it- bread, wine, oil, water, contracts. And because we believe in Sacraments, we also believe that all life is sacramental. Heaven is rooted in our day in, day out living.

Here’s an example: We enter into Scripture, read it, study it, pray over it, and we hope, maybe even expect that God’s wisdom will be revealed to us. Scripture, words, all outward signs becomes a path to the inward grace of God’s glory. We are moved by God’s Word. Reading becomes sacramental. Yes, the Bible is a Holy Book. We believe that, but sometimes we miss its sacramental nature by giving it its holy status too soon.

Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh, the Bible isn’t holy; it’s just a book of fiction”? My answer to that: “Oh, have you read it? My guess is that you haven’t given it its chance to read you.” The relationship between word and reader is what makes the Bible holy. It’s why we read Scripture within community.

Scripture, first as a simple book, then the Book becomes the Word of God and reveals the glory of God if we start by reading intently the book, and let it takes us where it will take us…. To let it have its affect, its way with you…. Taking you to those aha moments….. they unfold before you. This is holiness.

The same thing can happen living in the midst of our creation. If we “read” creation looking, expecting the grace of God’s glory, we will experience it. Sometimes the beauty of creation just takes us there, without work on our part…. Who hasn’t been moved by a glorious sunset? Yet it also comes to us through the simple: rocks and trees and ants, through clean laundry on a clothesline, blowing in the wind, a wild bobcat walking against your backyard fence, a small child skipping high into the air. The very things of our life point to the glory of living. We just have to see. Take the time. Let it have its way with you.

A bush, can become a burning bush; a human being can become a saint; Jesus becomes the Christ.

Sometimes we move so fast to find the holy, we forget the wholeness of our humanity, the health of our creation, the incarnation of God’s breathing spirit into the world.

We sometimes lose Jesus in the rush to worship him as God.

Jesus, flesh and blood, is the real deal, as human as he can get. Fully. He prays because he needs to. He risks unpopular opinions, and is afraid; he stands up to bullies; he reaches out to grieving folks; he learns how to make friends; he cries; he’s tempted; he asks for help; he is trying to find his voice; he’s angry; sometimes even dismissive; he suffers; he laughs; he plays.

He is so down to earth. He rejects both the intellectual wisdom of the Jewish authority and the philosophy of the Greeks, and speaks in parables pointing to the everyday: sowers sowing seed, shepherds looking for sheep, widows searching for coins, widow giving pennies, farmers pruning, merchants finding pearls, tax collectors climbing trees, or laborers arriving late to work.

And then Jesus says this beautiful thing: “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen my papa, my daddy.” A radical statement….just as if we said, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen my mommy.”

And seeing Jesus is seeing Jesus’ heart: his love, his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace, his inclusion, his hope, his unwavering support for us no matter what. And that’s who God is.

Jesus becomes sacramental- a window by which we see God.

And then he turns to us and says….. you’re the same. You are sacramental.

You are the light of the world. God’s grace is shining through you at all times. God lights you up. Don’t hide. Jesus isn’t admonishing introverts…. There is a sure way of putting your light under a bushel….

You cover up God’s light through arrogance, false piety, bullying, pettiness, or by abusing the poor, the widow, the sojourner, by using religion as a way to mask injustice. The Prophet Isaiah can’t be any clearer.

That “covering” happens when you think ***You*** are the Light. No, no, no…. you are the poem, the hymn, the watercolor painting, the stained glass elegy - Real Life is all about letting the light shine through you.

“You are the salt of the earth.” Salt is so precious. People were paid with salt, which is why salary is rooted in the word salt. The most used route in Rome was Via Salaria, the salt route. Salubrious, a great word of celebration, is rooted in salt. The Goddess of health was Salus. In Italy, you rub babies in salt for good luck; you put grains of salt in the baptismal waters to purify the water.

Let’s think about it. Salt is not valuable on its own, but what it can do to food…. Salt Saves food and Salt Savors food. The fullness of a thing comes about with Salt.

The fullness of our Saltiness is born out of our relationship with each other. We salt each other. It’s a dance, a flow, an energy. It’s holy. God is like a rubber band moving us, flinging us, aiming us, always into each other’s arms.

Hiding in plain sight, Jesus uses our everyday living to invite us into his own inner dynamic of experiencing the love of God…. He is beckoning us to Love. God is always winning and God’s love will win. Love does not lose, even when it is being crucified. God does not lose.

This is our amazing hopeful faith- and somedays, I admit, it’s hard to believe.

We are in the midst of a lot of pain. I’ve never had so many calls about fear, loss, confusion, anger and resentment. Never. I feel like we’re in our own, “it was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.”

Take heart. You reflect light of God; you are salt of the earth. You are the outward signs of an inward grace. You are heaven on earth.

I was listening to music on my way home from a graduation this weekend and a spiritual came on about our living, “This is it. Pay attention!”

Jesus believes in our Divine Dance rooted in our everyday experiences. So whatever you are doing, do it with gusto, do it boldly. Martin Luther, the great reformer, tells us to even sin boldly….. Why, because God is there, always winning even in the midst of our stumbling.

God’s love will win. Love does not lose, even when it’s being crucified. God does not lose.

Amen.