

Emmanuel Parish – Kirke White

June 6, 2010

Second Sunday after Pentecost

*I Kings 17:8-16[17-24]; Psalm 146; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17*

It is interesting that Fr. John asked me to preach on Trinity Sunday. Due to a family conflict, I told him I didn't think I would be available. So I had thought well, maybe I'll have a chance to give a sermon on the Trinity anyway. So here goes.] Last week Fr. John gave a great history of the doctrine. And he told three fishing tales to illustrate. The stupendous power of God the Father, the fish that got away; the fish that was caught and eaten with overtones of the Eucharistic meal we share and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross; and the fish that was released, to "dart away and come back" giving a metaphor for the power of the Holy Spirit as experienced in the world today.

Today our scriptures take us into the miraculous power of God to heal. They also lead us to think about that mysterious word "grace." Our vehicle for thinking together about grace and the Trinity is the life of the Holy Apostle Paul.

I identify with Paul on several common grounds. A very basic one is that he lost his sight after encountering the living Lord on the road to Damascus. You see I lost my sight due to a detached retina in my right eye in February of '06. It was an experience that brought me to be led literally around by family and friends. Due to the grace of God, the hands of a skilled 90 pound female surgeon and the prayers of friends, I healed and resumed driving trucks and today, have residual effects, but I am able to safely drive commercially. I also mention something else that is at the end of each of our New Testament lections. I glorified God because of what had happened to me. It is about healing, but also about God's grace/love being incarnated in so many friends, prayer-s, doctors and nurses.

Paul's experience from Holy Scripture parallels my own. He lost his sight on the road to Damascus. He lost his sight for 3 days. A vision came to a disciple named Ananias who followed the direction of that vision and came to him and laid on his hands, and prayed and something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. And Saul arose and was baptized. This is the conversion of the man we know as Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the Holy Apostle. God's grace, in a personal revelation of Jesus Christ to Saul, changed him so that he could be filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaim the good news of God the Father's love for all, not just Jews but also Gentiles.

Another point of identification for me is that Paul was a traditionalist. I, like he, followed closely the faith of my fathers and mothers. New innovations in faith matters were not something I employed or enjoyed or even considered. It is one of the questions I will ask of Paul, [if my God's grace I am allowed to be in heaven] "How did you change after your conversion experience on the Road from worship in the Jewish forms to those of what we now call and know as Christian forms?"

Well, I can imagine that Paul might say to me, look what I was before -- I once persecuted the proto Christian church, but I became one of its great advocates! Through the grace of God I was able to change and adjust so that I could preach the gospel of good news to all Gentiles and Jews.

I was first a "Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee" Acts 23:6. Christ intervened on the road. Whereas before I had strictly adhered to the rules of the Mosaic Law, now I reversed myself, and become a

promoter of grace for all, not just those who kept the law. Now there is a great lesson in the Galatians letter for us today and for the next 5 Sundays.

We all know what happens when tectonic plates move against each other. We have seen the terrible results in Haiti, and other parts of the world. Tsunamis send waves crashing on shores and kill unsuspecting humans.

Today in this letter to the Galatians, we see the tectonic plates of doctrine grinding together and creating a conflict. Paul's gospel of good news for all to accept the grace given by God was grinding against a doctrine from a group called the Judaizers. These were people who thought that the Mosaic Law had to be obeyed by new converts to Christianity. New male converts had to be circumcised—this action would give them salvation. The difference is free God-given grace and meritorious works by humans. You see the difference?

Paul said that there was nothing anyone could do to gain salvation on the human level. It had all been done by Jesus Christ, on the Cross of Calvary. Now The Holy Spirit of God was active in the world. And this was all in the Father's plan of salvation. To those who were coming into Galatia, and teaching against his doctrine of grace i.e., that you had to be circumcised to be saved, Paul simply said, we cannot do anything to save ourselves. We are dependent on God's mercy in Jesus Christ no matter whether we are slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female. God loves so much that we cannot ever do anything to merit or repay this favor. Our only possible response is to say, "I love you" "I thank you" for saving me from the self-centeredness of my existence.

The Mosaic Law Judizers were teaching that you had to follow the forms of Jewish religion before you could be saved. This is what Paul is dealing with in the letter to the Galatians. Do not be bound by the law but accept the free grace of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Now I started off my saying that I was seeking to preach the Trinity. This love of God for humans is one of the wonderful aspects of the novel titled The Shack. This novel portrays such love between the members of the Trinity. I don't think I am far wrong in saying that the theology of the story seeks to let us take a peek at this agape love, the grace that exists between the three members of the Trinity. We humans have to have a personality to hang our concepts on. The shack's plot line lets us see the love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Mr. Young does a great job of letting us get at the emotion and feeling of what we can only humanly describe as the agape love between the three persons of the Trinity.

This love is incarnated in our worship. I like to describe the dance of agape love that takes place when we gather in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are entering into the dance of un-self-serving love. We seek to draw others into that dance -- Away from pain and into joy -- Away from hurt and into healing -- leading us from previous understandings of the nature of God's love to more fully understand. Building, if you wish, on what has gone before to more fully understand the truths of God's heavenly Kingdom.

And why is this all important? The New Testament teaches that in the last day when Christ comes again, heaven and earth will be one. To me that means that we will be with God and enjoy God forever -- that means Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those who have accepted God's gift of love and returned that gift of love, will be with God. Those who have not, who have rejected that gift, will not. It is crucial that we understand this distinction. It is the reason that I myself have found the grace of God to be beyond all rejections in life. The older I grow, goes the old hymn,

the sweeter he grows. The longer I serve him, the sweeter he grows. Take out the male language and we find the decisive point.

I hope that you will taste a little bit of the love that is here. We are incarnational people. First we believe that God was incarnate in Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. And secondly, we believe that God's love is incarnated through us towards others. Astounding isn't it? Healing isn't it? Redeeming isn't it? Freeing, isn't it? Thanks Be to God.

*In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*

Amen.