

## **Sermon Proper 8 Year C June 27, 2010**

Memory and remembering is what keeps us together. Our shared reminds us that we are part of a distinct family and circle of friends; that we are in community with those around us; and most importantly that we are one family in God, united with all those who have gone before us, who are with us now and will come after us when we are long gone.

Our first reading is about the Elijah and his son Elisha. This passage invites us to reflect on our ancestors, those who have gone before us and inform who we are today. In the first reading Elisha knows that Elijah is near the end of his life. He asks him to give him a double portion of his spirit so he can carry on when he's gone. Elijah says he will grant Elisha's request only if Elisha sees him being taken away. As they are walking and talking a chariot of fire and horses whisk Elijah up in to the heavens and he is gone. This is the text for the old hymn Swing Low Sweet Chariot. As Elijah ascends he drops his mantel to earth. Elisha picks up his mantel and is given a double portion of his father's spirit.

The spirit of those who have gone before us lives on in us and we have a portion of their spirit in us. Too bad we didn't have this reading last week for Father's Day, because it is filled with truth about our fathers. I don't know about you, but as a young person I swore I would never find myself saying things that my parents said. Now as a parent those very same things flow freely out of my mouth, "No dessert unless you eat up all your food." And other things in a similar vein.

One of my mentors in Washington DC was former Senator Frank Moss of Utah who I considered my adopted grandfather. Senator Moss was fond of the quote, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." This quote often attributed to Sir Isaac Newton, is really authored by a 12<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Bernard of Chartes who wrote that *we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.*"

The American myth of being self-made men and women is just that...a myth. Each of us is who we are as a result of those who came before us...those who came to this country to begin again, those who suffered and toiled before us that we might have privilege that we simply don't think about in our contemporary context. One of the biggest aha moments for me in seminary was to learn just how privileged I am and most of us are in our current context. Sometime in the Fall I'd like to do a privilege walk with all of you in the parish as part of our service to just help all of us become aware of how fortunate and blessed with abundance we truly are. It can be lots of fun and help us learn a lot about ourselves.

Psalm 77 today also builds upon the value of memory and remembering our ancestors, those who came before us. The psalmist reminds us that in the midst of the very real experience of not getting an answer from God, we are called to the power of recollection. The writer says: "I will remember the works of the Lord, and call to mind your wonders of

old...By your strength you have redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.

There is truth to what the psalmist is getting at. In times of trouble we recall the good times to make us feel better and give us hope. I have found that this is especially true at times of death. At these times don't we gather and share the stories of our loved ones? We look back and remember the fun things, the silly things, and times of great meaning. I remember after my grandmother's funeral nearly 20 years ago, we gathered at a relative's home in the neighborhood where my dad grew up. As the aunts and uncles gathered they told story after story and we laughed. There seemed to be a common theme to my grandmother's life....she tried her best but could be a real pain in the you know what. And we'd laugh some more.

Family and old friends have a shared history, shared memories, it's what keeps us together. When I've talked to various people in the parish invariably I'll hear stories of Amma Jackie and how she was there for that person in special ways; I'll hear about Fr. Cannon and how he touched the lives of just about everyone in Poquetanuck, stories about the fish fries, stories about other times like the Giraffe Day, or past Liz Harris Cannonball runs.

The Eucharist itself is a service of remembering. We read the stories of our faith from our forbearers in the Jewish community who recall salvation history; the stories from the early church communities who were wrestling

with how to exist as these new Jesus communities and live in new ways; and from the stories of Jesus' life in our gospels.

The act of remembering is central to what we do every Sunday. We call it anamnesis from the Greek words Ana = anew and mimnēskesthai to remember. What we do in our liturgy is to remember anew to recall afresh what has happened. I invite you to listen closely to the prayer at the Great Thanksgiving with new ears. The prayer is remembering anew the story of salvation history and God's great deeds among God's people. After we sing the Holy, Holy, Holy I will invite you all to join me in saying the words of the Great Thanksgiving to help you appreciate how the prayer is an anamnesis of the story of God amongst God's people.

All that we do every Sunday is to remind us that we are God's people and part of all those who have gone before us, who are here now, and who will come after us. May we be faithful stewards of all that we've been given, may we appreciate those who have gone before us, those who make up the family of God in our time, and be faithful stewards of what we have as we prepare for those who will come after us. Amen.