

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

November 2, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37; Joshua 3:7-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23: 1-12

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Have any of you had the opportunity to do much running in your life? If you have, you will know that one of the most important exercises that you can do as a runner is what is called the “long, slow, run”. When combined with speed drills and endurance work the long, slow, run has a significant impact on your effectiveness as a runner.

You perform a long, slow, run by running at a speed that is one and a half to two minutes slower than your normal race pace, and you add a few extra miles to the distance that you normally run. This long, slow, run is very effective at increasing your stamina and helping to burn off fat. In fact, these long, slow, runs will help to raise your metabolism so that your body will actually burn fat while you are just sitting or sleeping. If you really want to be a good runner, long, slow, runs are very important and they are very effective.

I mention these long, slow, runs, because they are very much like what we are experiencing right now, spiritually, in this season of Pentecost. We have been running, so to speak, for a long time in this longest season of the church year. And as we have continued along, we have been looking very closely at how we actually live out our daily lives as Christians. We have been looking carefully for any “spiritual fat” that we may have accumulated that needs to be burned off if we are truly to glorify God with our lives.

The good news, if you have ever done long, slow runs, is that you know that sooner or later they will come to an end. Sooner or later you will come to some mile post that signals that very soon the run will be finished. You know that the run is very good for you, but you are also ready for it to end. Well you just may be happy to know that yesterday, after running spiritually for almost twenty-five weeks, we passed a significant mile post...the end is in sight.

As most of you probably know, yesterday was All Saints Day, a day where we pause and reflect on all of the saints that have gone before us. All of the individuals whose lives have made it possible for us to be here today, who have taught us, and inspired us and who have given us examples by their lives and words of how we might live. But not all saints are famous or have done mighty deeds.

In the sermon for All Saints Day, our Presiding Bishop stated:

"What saints will you remember this year on their feast? It's an occasion to remember all the faithful, whether we know their names or not. The Good Shepherd knows them by name, even if we don't. This year I'd invite you to celebrate the ones whose names you know and the ones whose names you haven't yet learned."

In your neighborhood, who is the saint who picks up trash? Who looks out for school children on their way to and from school? Who looks after an elderly or frail neighbor, running errands or checking to be sure that person has what is needed?"

Not all saints lived hundreds or thousands of years ago. Some are living right now. And as the Presiding Bishop stated, there are some whose names we know and some whose names we have not yet learned. Some saints just go about doing those things that make life better for others. As our patron saint, St. Francis, has suggested, some just go around being "Instruments of Peace".

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus gave us a couple of pretty good clues as to why we do not always recognize a saint when we see one. Speaking to his disciples, and us, regarding the scribes and the Pharisees who actually did teach what Moses had taught, Jesus said:

"...do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach...They do all their deeds to be seen by others;...They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi..." And then Jesus told the disciples, and us, how **we** are to act, how **we** are to live. He said:

"...you have one teacher, and you are all students...you have one Father—the one in heaven...you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

You can almost hear Jesus telling his disciples then and his disciples today, us, to not make a big show and to not draw attention to ourselves, but to just go out there and quietly and humbly do those things that will help to reconcile people to God. To humbly be "Instruments of Peace" to the world around us.

Describing what a humble person might look like, and why we often don't notice them, C.S. Lewis wrote:

"Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."

Our spiritual journey, our long, slow, run, through Pentecost has been focused on helping us to become the Christians that we are called to be, and to help us to be ready to answer with a firm "yes" when we perceive a clear, nagging spiritual call.

So let's imagine for a moment that we really have been listening to all of the lessons that we have been exposed to during these last twenty-five weeks. And let's imagine that we are really trying to make these lessons part of our daily lives as Christians. And let's also imagine that, as we go out into the world in which we live, that we really are committed to being "Instruments of Peace". We truly want to offer love, pardon, union, faith, hope, light and understanding to those we meet, and we are willing to invite others to "Come

and see”, to come and meet this Jesus that is so important to us. Right now, let’s imagine that this is a very realistic portrait of who we are, as individuals and as a church.

And now, let me ask you a question. What is our reaction going to be to those to whom we reach out, when they are not receptive? When our words and actions that are so important to us, are rejected, how will we feel?

There was something in the Forward Day By Day on October 22nd that we need to remember, something that can be very helpful. The author wrote:

*“In Morris West’s novel **The Clowns of God**, ...(the fictional ex-pope in the story) says: ‘The biggest mistake we’ve all made through the ages is to try to explain the ways of God to men. We shouldn’t do that. We should just announce him. He explains himself very well!’*

*“A herald announced the coming of an important person. Jesus appointed the seventy to go on ahead and announce his coming. He did not send them into just **any** town, but to the places where he himself intended to go. They did not go **instead** of him, but **ahead** of him, to announce his coming and thus prepare hearts to receive him.*

“As workers in God’s kingdom, we must understand our job description. What does it include? We are sent to announce the good news of Jesus. What does it exclude? We are not sent to convict or to convert; that’s the Holy Spirit’s job. Thus when people embrace the good news with joy, we cannot take the credit; when they reject our message, we have not failed. Faithfulness, not results, is our responsibility.” “Faithfulness, not results, is our responsibility.”

So as we come closer and closer to the end of our long, slow, run, our journey, through this very long season of Pentecost, let’s keep our focus on our goal. Let’s continue to look for areas in our lives that may be keeping us from being the Christian that God is calling us to be. Let’s look for and root out anything that might prevent us from saying “yes” to what we believe to be an invitation to participate more fully in God’s work of redeeming the world.

And let’s remind ourselves that we are not alone. Let’s remind ourselves that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us. A cloud of witnesses that have shown us the way, that offer us courage and direction. Witnesses...that are cheering us on toward our goal. Our goal of being the Christians that we are called to be. Our goal of being “Instruments of Peace”... “Instruments of Peace” to a world that needs and wants this “Peace”... very badly.

AMEN

