

February 24, 2010
St. Columba's Episcopal Church

It took me a while to determine what I needed to say to you this morning about the readings today. Like many others, I've known the story of Jonah since I was a little girl. I'm also fully aware that the people of Israel, especially the Pharisees, liked to ask Jesus for a sign. Ps. 51 and its words "cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me" has been a favorite of mine for years. However, for days, I struggled about what to say. I couldn't see it. Thankfully, the blindness gradually lifted with the help of my Lenten disciplines.

So far, I've exercised 2 Lenten disciplines. First, I've been reading a book called "We Have Seen the Lord" by William Barclay (the world renowned author of Bible commentaries). The book is a reader for Lent, including daily readings from scripture that lead to the Easter story and a writing from Barclay on each reading. Second, I attended the Lent Quiet Day at St. C's last Saturday. As I was praying on the readings that we read for this morning, it dawned on me that I needed to do something that I learned on Saturday, that is to "embrace and consent to sitting at the feet of my own life and be taught by it that I may be molded and shaped into the image of Christ and live a simple abundant life." So, I sat patiently at the feet of my own life waiting for more to be revealed. It was. This is how.

In Barclay's book, the reading for yesterday quoted from Mark 8:11-13. In that reading, the Pharisees came out and questioned Jesus. They were looking for a sign from heaven and trying to test Jesus. Like today's reading from Luke, in Mark, Jesus did not give them a sign. According to Barclay, there was a tendency in the age of Jesus to look for God in the abnormal. However, to Jesus, this was not due to a desire to see the hand of God; it was due to the blindness of this people to his hand. To Jesus, the whole world was full of signs for anyone who had eyes to see. Barclay added that the sign of a truly religious person is that they sanctify common places.

All of these concepts from Barclay's book were reflected in the welcoming prayer that we learned about at the Lent Quiet Day. According to Father Thomas Keating, the welcoming prayer is a practice of "letting go" in the present moment in the ordinary routines of life. What we are welcoming is the indwelling spirit's presence amongst the ALL of life (reminiscent of Ps. 51). Here's an example of a welcoming prayer, "I am where I need to be. Everything around me includes and hides the sacred." – Mary Mrozowski. According to Barclay, the poets knew and felt this, and that is why they were poets. Poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*
Amen.

Lent Reflection
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