

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

July 2, 2006 – Pentecost 4b

Pr. Robert M. Goldstein

"The Healing Christ"

Texts: 2 Sam. 1:26-27; Mark 5:21-43

There are times in our lives when we want, when we need a miracle! "If only God would..." "God, I really need you now..." We even are reduced to bargaining, "God, if you get me through this I will...?"

It is in these desperate contexts of life that the Christ does work healing power. A desperate woman who, as Scripture says, "endured much under many physicians," was desperate enough to push her way through the crowds and risk insulting Jesus by touching his cloak. Such an act in those harshly super-righteous days would have made Jesus unclean. Touched by a woman! A religious scruple of the day -- disgusting for its obsession with all the wrong things! How about an obsession with justice and compassion?

Jesus, not concerned about the excessive religious violation, is nevertheless aware that someone has touched him and drawn on his strange power to heal. He announces an investigation, "Who touched my clothes?" His charisma calms the crowd and it divides as that forlorn woman fesses up. That desperate woman comes clean with the whole truth -- and her honesty, courage and trust moves Jesus to welcome her into a faith relationship with him, where there is forgiveness, healing and peace. This is the classic instance of "live in forgiveness, claim your wholeness, go in peace."

If only life were always like that! If only desperation brought us healing! Not so for King David who has lost his Jonathan whose love, Scripture says, "was to David wonderful, passing the love of women." Jonathan was dead, as dead as Jairus' little daughter. But there was no Jesus to bring Jonathan back. If only life could!



Eric was a beautiful man. Good looking, a lawyer, compassionate, with lots of friends and fabulous social graces. But two of his friends, Noellia and Sam, are sitting across from me, in tears, telling me about the wonderful gifts Eric had brought to their lives -- "had brought," because Eric was no more. By Eric's own hand.

We all feel so desperate in that room, like David over Jonathan, like Jairus over his darling daughter, like that unnamed woman who the doctors could not heal. We all feel also a frustrating mixture of sorrow and anger over what Eric has done. Where is God in this? Where is the Christ? I felt so empty of any Good News?

But is Christ here? I may be the pastor, but I am not the Christ. That's the first clarification. Yet I am a pastor of the Christ and I am as, as Martin Luther describes each one of you also, we are little "Christs" to our neighbors. And here are my neighbors, Noellia and Sam, all churning up inside with grief, with love, with anger, and visited by that dark spirit of guilt wondering aloud how they could have somehow intervened in time.

A desperate room indeed. Oh Jonathan where are you? Oh my darling daughter, don't die on me! I'm a woman bleeding to death and no one can help me! Oh Eric, where are you? How could you? Dear Eric! Dear Eric!

Where is God? Where is the Christ?

Well I realize now, and that is how miracles are grasped you know, I realize now that Christ was appearing in that room and beginning to heal.

They talked candidly of Eric's background -- of a brutal past and an inconsolable present that pastoral confidences forbid my naming. And why we couldn't really do anything about that, we could make sense of some of the sufferings that broke his spirit. And to be able to speak that truth, like that woman before Jesus, Christ began to appear in the room of our desperation.

But there was more. And, in that more, Christ came speaking words of healing into our midst. Now I realize that.

We talked about the loneliness of being single and especially a sexual minority and single. We talked about Eric's loneliness. We talked about the fact that sexual minority literature and drama is beginning to move beyond the heady years of the coming out stories -- stories that are no less meaningful and important for struggling individuals today. We talked about sexual minority drama needing a Neil Simon who can write comedy and tragedy about the next stage of LGBT life: living together and daily living alone.

We talked about the fact that the heterosexual world has many models of living life together and alone, why even television ads reaffirm heterosexuals every day. But where are the ads of two men or two women buying a car? They have barely started and they are very carefully ambiguous.

We talked about how too many gay people live only by the model of partying, drinking and sex. But life, for both straight and gay, is more than that. If we only live by that worn out model, we too become victimized by despair and loneliness. In the *New York Times* this morning, there is an article on the increasing isolation of modern people.

It was then that I mentioned St. Francis as a community of people, straight and LGBT, who are actually forging a new model for sexual minority people like Eric. A model of learning how to live in forgiveness -- not so much over one's sins, but in forgiving fathers, mothers, religions, society and past lovers. Learning to live in real-time forgiveness.

But also learning how to claim our wholeness as persons of integrity and persons in community. Learning to admit to ourselves how desperate and lonely a party life really becomes. Learning that in caring for others, caring beyond our narcissistic selves, caring enough

to feed the homeless, caring enough to push the justice agenda locally, nationally and internationally, caring enough to bring all kinds of families and individuals into this experimental family, caring enough to learn how to celebrate all of this in worship, we were learning that life has more to give, more to offer. We are learning to build interpersonal relationships and deepening the meaning of love. Claiming our wholeness -- whole-ness.

For a moment we felt a sense of peace among the three of us. We envisioned something, this church has envisioned something to help future Eric's. We parted with a taste of that peace.

So Christ was there after all and healing has begun to take place. You and I are instruments of such healing, means of grace in our humble bodies. You and I can find Christ in our midst -- even in the most desperate of times, when the mighty have fallen, when the humble have fallen too. You and I are exploring the grace of a new paradigm of a fuller life for all people! Christ the healer is indeed in our midst.

Amen

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