

## **All Saints**

### **6 June, 2010**

Last Sunday morning I was on a road trip back to my old home stomping grounds in western Connecticut. On the way down I somehow managed to make the 8 o'clock service in Holyoke, Massachusetts, much to the surprise of our former rector Barbara Thrall. Beside the pleasure of catching up with her I took along the added bonus of some insight from her sermon.

It seem that recently, the clergy of Western Massachusetts gathered with their Bishop to discuss the state of things with the conclusion being that the old model of being the Church wasn't working. The idea of a beautiful eye catching building with lots of inspiring programs inside wasn't cutting it. They recognized that both attendance and contributions both locally and nationally were in decline and if the Church was to survive it somehow must find a way to adapt.

Unlike the line from the movie Field of Dreams "if you build it they will come" reality wasn't the movies. The consensus was if the Church was to succeed in it's mission it had to move beyond the security of it's walls and move on out into the world. That by doing so, those outside the walls might respond in gratitude by becoming part of the mix that generates the life God calls us all to have. It's not a novel idea by any means but one that can put us outside our comfort zones.

I found myself nodding in agreement and wanted to shout out "hey we at All Saint's, Littleton are beginning to move in that direction and it works". Did you know that last year we as a parish showed the greatest percentage of a pledge giving increase in the whole Diocese? Sure a lot of it has to do with

the fireball of a rector that Dick and I stand in for today but I think we as a church have begun to see and behave as the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Just a couple of examples such as reaching out in faith to build the Parish Hall and now find it's use and benefit for the community increasing by the month. Outreach, be it the Burch House, expanded giving through MDGs, and a list of giving that goes on through out the year are a pretty good start but it's no time for self congratulation.

The possibilities are endless and for inspiration we have three examples from today's lessons of just what could happen if we let the Spirit lead us outside the walls. None of the three stories play out in the places they might call home or in Church, instead we find each on the road to someplace else and called by the Spirit to something greater than imagined.

Elijah, we are told, has the word of the Lord come to him telling him to go to Zarephath and live there with a particular widow and her son. He shows up at her door and of the little bit she has to get by on in the way of food he demands to be fed. That's where the first miraculous event takes place as the jar of meal and flask of oil she has to offer never runs out. Still the woman isn't quite convinced this Elijah fellow is on the up and up. In fact, she is pretty upset with him, accusing Elijah, her house guest, of causing the death of her ill son.

Miracle number two, Elijah calls upon the Lord to revive the dead boy, and God actually hears his plea and revives the boy. Imagine, that's what it takes for the woman to actually believe that Elijah is a man of God.

It makes me wonder if her disbelief is any greater than what we might encounter today in either our own lives or of those around us. Just what wondrous sign would it take to press your belief button?

St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians begins by telling us that he didn't receive the Gospel from human origins. If we know his story it is one where by he was a persecutor of the Church before his blinding encounter on the Damascus road. This life changing event sends him not towards Jerusalem but instead to Arabia and beyond spreading the story of Christ. It takes years before he sets foot in Jerusalem and only then meets a couple of the apostles.

Spirit sent and driven Paul leaves what he knows and spreads the good news throughout the known world.

Finally our Gospel story finds Jesus on the road where he enters a town called Nain. While it's only a couple of miles on the map from Nazareth as the crow flies it's not far from the Samaritan border. Not a place you'd be likely to find a sympathetic Jew. Still, Jesus has compassion for the widow who has lost her only son. He touches the bier and the boy's life is restored.

The obvious miracle, or life changing moment, of course is when life is returned to the son. What we fail to see in our time is that the widow has her life restored as well, for in Jesus' day without a family, primarily a son or husband, the widows in both the 1<sup>st</sup> Kings lesson and the Gospel are left with no means of support. With life restored to both sons the mothers are not left destitute.

Three stories then of 3 men open to the call of the Spirit all on the road and all doing what to the rational mind is impossible. So where does that leave you and I?

Only a couple of short weeks ago this place was filled with color and the Gospel proclaimed in nearly 20 languages. A sign that for the early Church showed the diversity of God among us. Was it all just to celebrate an event long past or are we to do something more radical with it? Do we keep the excitement here inside the walls or just shared on the web page or do we let it out?

To let it out is to accept risk as the doors to the building not only swing outward but then close behind us. In just one step we're at once on the road and off to places where everyday miracles are performed. It may or may not be something as exciting or bold as to physically raise someone whose died but there is ample opportunity to restore lives.

It is my belief that we are to be conduits, open channels, for the grace of God to flow in a broken world. In our day, the here and now, each of us is being asked to hit the road like Elijah, Paul and Jesus and perform the unexpected when the time comes. To go where only you can go and do what only you can do and trust God, so that when the time comes he'll provide the power if you plug him in.

It's a risky business being a follower of the Spirit. Come September Sheelagh and I are off to Kenya to visit the Meisori School that we are helping support through our MDG funding project. I have to be honest it's not an idea or place I'm at all comfortable with. Still I have to believe it's faith that provides the miracles and not the other way round. You can't be a

channel for God's grace to others if it's locked up in the warehouse. So I've got to go.

Where are you headed with that first step? Is it around the corner, in your home, at school, across the river or over the sea, for without you the prisoner waits to be set free, the lowly need lifting up, the blind awaits his sight, strangers, orphans and widows look anxiously for you're coming.

Here I am Lord send me. AMEN