

Sermons at Saint Mark's

Brian Sellers Peterson

The Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 6, 2010

1 Kings 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17

Gladden the Hearts

My name is Brian Sellers-Petersen. For the past 15 years, I have called Saint Mark's home. I stand here with a heavy heart as many of you do. Our friend Canon Carl Knirk passed away last week and we miss him very, very much. He leaves a loving family and his beloved Susan. Some of you don't know Carl personally, but if you have been around Saint Mark's for any length of time you have seen his fingerprints and felt his impact. Carl's ministry as Canon for Stewardship and Evangelism in the Diocese of Olympia and the Episcopal Church will impact all of us for many years to come.

When I changed jobs ten years ago to work for Episcopal Relief & Development, I adopted Carl as my mentor and counselor and we became fast friends. I miss Carl so much. I wish he was here with us with his big smile and easy way (check out his big smile on the Diocese of Olympia website – www.ecww.org – I especially love the photos – with Susan, with his son David's wedding party and his granddaughter, Avery). In fact he is with us and will continue to serve his God in ways beyond our understanding, inspiring people to be generous with their time, talent and treasure. I know Carl is with us and he wants me to get on with the sermon.

The Gospel lesson is a hard one. It is one of those miracles that defies human logic and experience. Jesus heals lots of people in the Gospel of Luke. A woman approaches him at a dinner party and pours perfume on his feet. Another woman battles through a crowd to touch the hem of his garment. Just before today's story, a centurion sends word through

his friends that his servant is ill. "Just give the word," the man says, "and I know he'll be healed." Jesus praises all three people and attributes their healing to their faith. But the woman in today's story? She doesn't ask Jesus to raise her son. She doesn't fall on her knees and beg for her son's life. All she does is cry. All she does is cry.

Jesus shows compassion to those who grieve. He understands what it is like to lose someone close. He stands with us. He sits with us. He cries with us. In small and large ways he provides comfort. Sometimes through angels unaware or through those closest to us. Maybe through a phone call from a friend. Or a reminiscence of our loved one. Or a hug from someone who is just learning to walk and to talk. He is with us. I am reminded and comforted by the words from St. Matthew, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Jesus still raises the dead. We trust that promise each time we bring another person to the waters of Holy Baptism and say those words: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." Not just for our time on earth, but forever

Jesus still raises the dead. We trust that promise each time we bring our shattered lives, our broken hearts, our anger, our depression, our deepest hurts to the Lord's Table and hear His sure and certain words: "This is my body and this is my blood given and shed for you!"

Jesus still raises the dead. We trust in the words said at the Celebration of Life of our loved ones, “I am Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he dies. And everyone who has life, and has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die for ever.

I learned about Carl’s passing while in the middle of Belize, just after seeing an organic farm enterprise run by a woman who had just won the award as “the Farmer of the Year” from the Ministry of Agriculture and just before seeing a small business that benefited from a micro loan, training and ongoing technical assistance from Episcopal Relief & Development and the Diocese of Belize. Both of these enterprises speak of new life and resurrection as well as Carl’s ministry of enabling of generosity and witness to new life.

The Farmer of the Year, a refugee and single mother from El Salvador who faced a life for poverty is now growing tomatoes, plantains, peppers, corn and squash and has cattle, chickens and a tilapia pond. The food feeds her family and provides for her neighbors and community and inspiration for her adopted country. New life in so many ways!

On my way home from Belize, while missing my friend and contemplating life and work without him, I found his business card in my wallet. There is no reason to keep Carl’s business card – I know all his contact information by heart and have his cell # in my speed dial. Just like Carl, he has much more on his business card than address and phone number. His personal work tagline is Enabling Generosity! On the back of his card is:

FIVE STEPS TO FINANCIAL DISCIPLESHIP

1. Everything you have is a gift from God
2. No one has everything, no one has nothing.
3. All you have you will lose.
4. While you are in possession of it, you, and only you decide how to use it.

5. How you use everything that passes through your hands will determine the kind of person you are and will become – Gratitude begets Gratitude

“For where you treasure is, there will your heart be also” Matthew 6:21

We all know that saying that divides the world into people whose glass is half full and people whose glass is half empty. Carl’s glass was full and overflowing. I love baptisms at Saint Mark’s, especially at the 9:00 service when a huge crowd of children, young and old, crowd around the full and overflowing baptismal font to see the action up close. The water always overflows; the waters of new life make puddles for our children to enjoy while we welcome the newly baptized. Then our clergy and children march around the Nave getting the rest of us wet. On Pentecost Sunday one boy came prepared in his rain boots. For those of us who grieve, the waters of new life touch us and draw us to the source of all goodness and resurrection.

This past Monday I received some illustrations that I am going to be using for a project focused on community gardens and sustainable agriculture globally. They came from a board member/artist who serves as the rector of Holy Spirit Parish in Lake Forest, Illinois. I was looking at the illustrations at Diocesan House when Bishop Greg was passing by and he commented that one illustration included a quote that Carl loved. In closing I want to read it to Carl’s Saint Mark’s family as it sums up Carl’s life in Christ and his witness to new life.

Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So be swift to love. Make haste to be kind, and the blessing of God be always with you.

Amen.