

Jesus is the Real Deal

April 29, 2007

Brandon Hamilton

Dear Lord, In times of trouble and despair watch over us.
Heal us with your powerful Love and put our doubts to rest.
Help us find our own God moments and let us find you in
all the faces and the places in our lives. In the name of the
Father , Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen. (Please be seated)

Good Morning. My name is Brandon Hamilton and I was asked to lead this morning's service while Father Pat is away. I am a member of the Church vestry and also help lead the high school youth group. It is an honor and privilege to share my thoughts today and I would especially like to thank my parents for coming out today. I would like to begin the Homily today with the question that has been hanging in the air in the wake of recent tragedies in the news. "Where is God?" (Pause)....

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When we think of the students gunned down just as they were beginning to make their way in the world many ask “Where is God?”

When a young soldier dies and leaves his wife with 2 kids behind we hear voices asking “Where is God?”

When we read about millions living in poverty in AIDS infected communities in Africa we hear voices ask “Where is God?”

So how does one begin to answer that question?

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning we catch our first glimpse of an answer. We read about Tabitha who was devoted to good works and charity. She even made clothes for her friends which she made while she was with them. Tabitha as we read here dies from an illness. So the disciples send for Peter. And what does he do? He follows in the path of Jesus. Peter raises her from

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the dead. It is a true miracle. In the weeks after Easter we are reminded of the resurrection in the miracle that Peter performs. We must remember how significant this act is. It is a time when the early Christian church is forming. People are looking for Christ. They are looking for signs that “Yes” Jesus is the real deal. Jesus really was resurrected. We are still looking for signs. Well this was a HUGE sign. In fact it says at the end of the reading that after it was done “Many believed in the Lord”. So perhaps we get our first glimpse in the readings today where God is.

It is so fitting today that along with the great hope of today’s readings that we have the 23rd psalm. If there was a billboard top 10 list of favorite psalms I would say that clearly psalm 23rd would be a contender for number 1. So why is it so popular? We have all heard it before. It simply begins “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.” We could close our eyes and the words seem to roll over our hearts and soothe our tired souls. “He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.”

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This psalm has a calming effect on us. It is the one that is printed on many payer cards at funerals. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil”. Perhaps those are the words that many hold on to in times of despair.

Most of us have been in that valley. Perhaps we are in that valley right now when we think of the unspeakable tragedies that have occurred in the last month. This psalm was written for us to remind us that no matter what life throws at us we are protected. The healing words of the psalm wash over us. When we hear this psalm it’s as if God is holding our hand and guiding us as we make our way through the grieving process.

The 2nd reading today comes from Revelations. Revelations always fascinates me. When you read the readings it’s like you are walking through a dreamscape where nothing is real and everything is a symbol for something else. I guess

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that's what holds it appeal for me for it's like unraveling a good mystery novel looking for clues. In this reading today we are pulling back the curtain and getting a glimpse of heaven. And we see a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes, peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb. I think this is very significant. This reading is telling us that God's promise of salvation is for everyone regardless of where we come from. No country or nationality has a lock on salvation. And John sees this and wonders what it's all about. I find it very interesting when the elder addresses John and asks him "Who are these robed in White and where are have they come from". This is a part that feels so much like a dream to me for surely Isn't JOHN supposed to be asking that question. To paraphrase he replies. "Hey buddy...obviously you already know the answer. You are supposed to be telling ME that. And the elder does tell him and speaks to him with deep and powerful symbolism about washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. He speaks about them going through the great ordeal

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and how now they will hunger no more, thirst no more, the sun will not strike them. Their tears will be washed away.

Again today in this reading we are being shone that the Lamb of God is watching over us and protecting us as we each go through our own great ordeals in this world.

Which brings us to the Gospel reading.

It begins with Jesus walking in the temple in the winter.

You can almost feel the spiritual chill in the air. The Jews are trying to trap Jesus into to admitting he is the Messiah so that they have him on record so they can use it against him. However on another level they truly want to know.

They want to be told directly. They want to hear it straight from the horse's mouth. They want it to be clear as a bell.

But Jesus uses this as a lesson to speak to us today. He tells them that he has told them already but they do not believe.

Perhaps he was one of the first to say "Actions truly speak louder than words". Jesus tells them "you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep." He goes on to say

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that the sheep who follow hear my voice. He will give his sheep eternal life and they will never perish. He will protect them and no one snatch them out of his hand. This reading ends with Jesus saying “The Father and I are one.” Jesus is telling us that God watched over him and now in the name of the Father he is watching over us.

So “Where is God? Perhaps God is burning in all the candles that were lit during the memorial services at Virginia Tech. Perhaps God is in the prayers that go out everyday to watch over our soldiers that are in harms way. I had my own “God moment” this week. I had planned on running the Chicago marathon this fall. It is one of the big ones and very popular. I found out from a friend that it had already filled up and there were no more spots left. So I went to their website and sure enough there were no more entries. Even the tour groups had filled up their slots. But I noticed that they still had entries for people that wanted to run for charity. I noticed that there were spots for Team World Vision. World Vision is the same organization that

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the youth group uses to raise money for world hunger. They donate much of their money to areas in Africa with communities affected by AIDS. So I joined their team. For me, marathon running has always been about me and the clock. Now I feel blessed that I am able to train for something much bigger than my goal time. After watching American Idol this past week and literally watching children die from extreme poverty and AIDS I feel that God's hand was at work in calling me to raise awareness and money to fight poverty around the world. God has given me the gift of running and now I have found a way to use this gift to give back.

Finally this morning I want to share a song that I recently discovered and it has become one of my favorites. This year when we took the high school kids to the Bishop's Ball in Trenton they had a concert before the dance. They played a song called "Holy Now" which was written by singer-songwriter Peter Mayer. The song spoke to me so when I got home I downloaded it to my ipod and listen to it

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now on the train on to way to work. The song is about going through the experience of suddenly realizing that God is all around us in everything that we do. Many of us experience this during life altering events such as the birth of a child or perhaps the death of a loved one. Over the years through a series of events in my life such as marrying my wife Sue and finding a spiritual home at Grace church I have realized how God has surrounded me with his love. The lyrics of the song “Holy Now” really speaks to me and I would like to share them with you.

When I was a boy, each week
On Sunday, we would go to church
And pay attention to the priest
And he would read the Holy Word.
And consecrate the holy bread
And everyone would kneel and bow
Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now.

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Everything, everything,

Everything is holy now . . .

When I was in Sunday school

We would learn about the time

Moses split the sea in two

Jesus made the water wine

And I remember feeling sad

that miracles don't happen still

But now I can't keep track

’Cause everything's a miracle

Everything, everything

Everything's a miracle . . .

Wine from water is not so small

An even better magic trick

is that anything is here at all.

So the challenging thing becomes

not to look for miracles

but finding where there isn't one.

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Holy water was rare at best
barely wet my finger tips
Now I have to hold my breath
I'm swimming in a sea of it
Used to be a world half there
Heaven's second rate hand me downs
now I walk it with a reverent air,
"cause everything"s holy now.

This morning outside I stood
And saw a little red-winged bird
Shining like a burning bush
Singing like a scripture verse
It made me want to bow my head.
and i remember when church let out -
how things have changed since then,
everything is holy now.

Everything, everything
Everything is holy now

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Everything, everything,

Everything is holy now . . .

So as you let the that song sink in and as you remember today's readings think once again about this profound question. "Where is God?"

Amen