

27th Sunday on Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 10.7.18

Genesis 2:18-24/Hebrews 2:9-11/ Mark 10:2-16

HOLD FAST TO THE DREAM

It was the summer of a terrible drought in a mid-American state that depended on rain for their crops. The fields were parched and brown from the lack of rain. The crops lay dry and wilted from thirst. People were becoming desperate for any sign of relief. Hot days turned into arid weeks. No rain came. The ministers of the local churches called for an hour of prayer in the town square the following Saturday. They asked everyone to bring an object of faith for inspiration. At noon on the appointed Saturday the townsfolk gathered. With hope and anxiety they prayed that God would bless them with rain for their fields. The ministers were touched to see the variety of objects people clung to: crosses, rosaries, Bibles, holy cards and icons. And then, at the end of the hour, as if on divine command, a soft rain began to fall. Cries of joy rose from the community. They waved their treasured religious objects in grateful praise. But from the middle of the crowd one symbol of faith overshadowed all the others. A nine-year old girl had brought an umbrella.



Children possess that simple, uncomplicated way of looking at life that deflates the most convoluted adult “logic” and the “conventional wisdom” that we “smarter” adults invoke to rationalize and justify the often less-than-godlike things we do. This week I encountered another nine-year old girl who exhibited the same kind of faith and trust and wisdom. She convinced me that Jesus knew what he was doing when he said: *Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.* The little girl I encountered is Sheillah Sheldone Charles and she lives in Kenya, Africa. I came across her by chance on a YouTube video.



At the tender age of nine she calls herself an artist, a designer and a model. She has an amazing artistic talent which she acknowledges is God-given. She claims no responsibility for it except that she must use it not for herself, but for others. She teaches other children to instill confidence in them. She acknowledges the importance of sharing one’s talents, never hoarding them. Her art work is quite captivating. Many of her paintings are taller and wider than she is. She paints lions because people associate Kenya with those animals. She loves her family and her homeland of Kenya. She’s drawn portraits of the president of Kenya. She has found her passion in life and she wants to pursue it forever. And she says she paints women “because they suffer a lot” and they are

“the most important people in our family.” I wonder how Jesus would handle this precocious and delightful little child had he placed his hands on her to bless her: this nine-year old girl who seems to understand compassion and the importance of sharing, the joy of family and the role of leadership, the struggles of humanity and the social issues of the day.



Jesus might have to admit that this little girl “gets it,” more than his disciples, and the Pharisees who hung around him only to try to trap him. Like they tried when they asked him the question: *“Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?”* It would take several weeks of Bible study classes to reflect in depth on the challenging readings we are given to ponder this week in both the Old and New Testament. But one thing we can say about them, as simply as Sheillah explained why she painted women: *“Women suffer a lot.”*

Women have suffered from a misconstrued interpretation of the creation story in the Book of Genesis. Some have interpreted that because the creation myth says that man was created first and woman was taken from his “spare rib” that she is subservient to him. But a close reading of

the text doesn’t justify that interpretation. Adam in isolation was incomplete; the animals weren’t enough. God himself declared: *It is not good for the man to be alone.* In response to the problem, God dreamed a wild dream. A dream of likeness. A dream of partnership. A dream of intimacy. When the dream was realized — when God brought Eve to Adam — the first human being cried out in a kind of joy that had never been heard on the earth before: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”* Here at last is a true equal. A companion. A friend. Here is someone I instinctively recognize — someone obviously as precious, as singular, and as priceless to me as own bones, my own flesh, my own self. It was the creation of woman that brought fullness and fulfillment. This is nothing less than the equality of the sexes. Male and female, both created in the image of God, both co-heirs to the gift of salvation offered in Christ.

In the gospel the question used to test Jesus — *Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?* — leaves out the question of a wife divorcing her husband. So Jesus added a parallel to include the wife. The ancient world lost sight of the beauty of Genesis and the creation account. Women had become property, a possession of the man. Moses permitted divorce because of the “hardness of their hearts,” not as a norm. The question is not a legal one, Jesus told them. Not at its heart. At its heart, the question of all human interaction, all human community, is spiritual. What did God originally intend? What is God’s enduring dream? *“That the two become one flesh.”* That no one separates what God joins together. That we receive each other as equals, as partners, as intimates. That what we are to each other

is not commodity or object, scapegoat or conquest, but an extension of our own bones and flesh. Companions as essential, as vulnerable and as worthy of tenderness and protection as our own bodies.



(*The Creation of Man and Woman* by Yoram Raanan)

This is the struggle we are facing both in the church and in our society. To recognize men and women as equal partners on the journey. When we look at the hierarchy of the church and see the lack of participation of women in decision-making and positions of leadership, we begin to recognize what we are missing in reflecting the full complement of the Body of Christ. We can take hope in the fact that the Synod on Young People, called by Pope Francis and taking place right now in Rome, has women at the conference tables and leading dialogue sessions to bridge this gap. When we see our nation virtually exploding in pain, rage, doubt, and frustration over the testimonies before the Senate Judiciary Committee of Dr. Christine Ford and Judge Brett Kavanaugh we realize how far we have yet to come in treating one another with fairness and justice.

What would it be like if “Boys will be boys” gave way to “Bone of my bones?” If the powerful recognized the *image of God* in those who are powerless? If women ceased to be objects and became subjects? If conquest gave way to

companionship, and legal bickering gave way to love? At this particular moment, when so many people -- so many of us -- feel tired, angry, and bruised, God’s dream for human community might feel like a pipe dream. Hardness of heart might feel easier and more accessible. Maybe it is. But something in me thrills at the dream, even still, and I believe that’s because God planted the dream deep into our hearts a long time ago and trusts us to keep it alive now. Today’s scriptures are about you and me -- about our God-given dignity, about the deep love and care in which each of us is held by our God, about the life of each human being that we are called to honor and respect. About the beauty and joy of being together whether in marriage or in friendship or in community. And those teachings still need to be learned and re-learned.

Bone of my bones.

Flesh of my flesh.

One humanity.

Perfect joy.

The dream for which we were created.

Let's never give up on it.

John Kasper, OSFS