

Proper 10, Yr. B
July 12, 2009

When we last spoke (a week ago) I presented material that I drew from the Epistle reading from last Sunday; material I called the 10 Transformations. Each of us were asked to pick one and work on it during this week. So how did you do? You may recall that I picked numbers 1 and 9 and I found that, when I remembered to start each day with a prayer not to think too highly of myself and not to think of myself as wiser than I am, then I would stay mindful of the prayer as I went through the day and I did pretty well.

Well that was great, but what are we going to do this week? Because it's one thing to stay focused on a spiritual discipline for a few days, but it's another thing to stay with it until the transformation really becomes a part of us, and it's that "other thing" that I want to talk about today. But first, a little digression.

One of the things I love to do each day is read the newspaper. If I get to start my day with a bowl of cornflakes, a cup of coffee, and the Inquirer, then I'm a pretty happy guy. And I noticed that there was a lot of religion in the news this week.

First, on Tuesday morning there was a headline that read "World's oldest Christian Bible is reunited, digitized. This is about a 4th century Greek version of the Bible that has had different parts of it held in Britain, Germany, Russia and Egypt, but has been brought back together digitally and is available on the web for anyone to view. See <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

Now I've been a student of the Bible my entire adult life, so I find this kind of story fascinating, and you better believe that I got right on the internet and looked it up, as I'm sure millions of others have as well.

Second, in Saturday's Inquirer the photo on the front page was of President and Mrs. Obama meeting the Pope, with the article describing the 30 minute meeting where they discussed the Middle East, care for the poor, and their very public disagreement on abortion.

Third, in the travel section of today's Inquirer, there is a beautiful color photo of a hiker overlooking a body of water, with a headline that reads "Where Jesus Walked," and a story about a new pilgrimage trail called the "Jesus Trail" where people can actually follow the steps of Jesus as they are described in the gospels as well as hiking through Crusader Battlefields and Muslim Shrines. See <http://www.jesustrail.com/>

Three seemingly unrelated stories, except for the fact that each one of them reminds us of the enduring power of the Christian faith and people, to learn about the Bible by using modern technology, to engage in society today and attempt to influence public policy, and to entice people to experience something of Jesus by traveling to his home and walking in his footsteps. Anyone who thinks that the Christian faith has become irrelevant only needed to read the paper this week to see Christianity's enduring power.

And power is that “other thing” to which I referred at the beginning of this sermon and which I want to talk about today.

Power, of course, is a tricky topic because, as the saying goes “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

And, of course, we have a very graphic example of that saying in our gospel lesson today, where King Herod has John the Baptist beheaded and is keeping an eye on this Jesus character because, when push comes to shove, he was going to do whatever was necessary to protect his power by eliminating any perceived threats.

History is filled with countless examples of people who have been corrupted by either the pursuit of power or the determination to protect it. And in our own daily lives we have all encountered people who use their personal power to have their own way and exert control over us. So while I want to talk about power in our Christian lives, I am not talking about Christians trying to control everything or, like Herod, protecting what power we’ve got.

For us, transformation actually begins with an acknowledgement of our powerlessness to do much of anything on our own; along with a commitment to trust in God who actually has all the power we need. The power of a Christian is actually grounded in humility.

I know that sounds a lot like AA, where the first two of the twelve steps are an admission of powerlessness and trust in a higher power, but did you know that AA was founded by Episcopalians? You’ve seen the bumper sticker “Another friend of Bills.” Well, Bill was an Episcopalian who built his 12 steps of recovery upon traditional Christian principles.

And the power that I want you to know about and which will help us continue to work with our transformations is stated best in the 11th step of AA, “we sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, **praying only for a knowledge of God’s will and the power to carry that out.**” The power that we Christians have is the power of God to help us do his will. So add this to your prayers each day: “God, help me to know your will today and give me the power to do it.”

The power to tell the truth when a fib would be easier; the power to forgive when it would be easier to resent; the power to stop and help when it would be easier to keep on walking.

Whatever God shows you in the course of a day. Christianity is still a powerful force in the world, not merely for selling newspaper, but for transforming lives that reflect the Grace and Love of the God we know in Jesus Christ.

Lord, give us a knowledge of your will and the power to do it. Amen.