

Sermon for September 3, 2006 PROPER 17

12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"THE ONLY THING PERMANENT IS CHANGE"

I have been so busy studying my Hinduism tapes these days in preparation for our upcoming adult forums in comparative religion that I have not been keeping up with the news. For instance, Tuesday our parish administrator came in and asked, "Did you hear they demoted Pluto?" My first reaction was, "what has Disney gone and done now?" All the animals talk except that poor dog and worse yet a dog name Goofy in the same cartoons wear clothes, walks on his hind legs and speaks perfectly good American English.

Well, I was a little embarrassed when I found out we were talking about the (dwarf) planet, Pluto. First the Roman church kicks out saints we all knew and loved. It's a good thing Anglicans regard all baptized Christians as saints (It's in the Bible) and we feel that a good exemplary life is more necessary for sainthood than canonization. (I'm keeping my St. Christopher medal. Which Christopher are we talking about?) The name Christopher only means, "bearer of Christ" anyway. There are lots of those.

Actually Pluto didn't change, just our knowledge of Pluto changed. In the 27 years since I have been ordained things having to do with church have changed rapidly. Maybe it's just our knowledge of church and God that has changed. I have welcomed some supposed changes and resisted others. House keeping chores and liturgical practices have modified and changed. In the decades I have been involved we have gone from being social activists in the 60s to being social workers in the 70's, to being revisionists in the 80s, to trying to be all-inclusive in the 90s. And some of that has worked and made us better and some has made us misunderstood. Agree with all of it or not I have to tell you from the inside it has all been our human effort to know Christ and make Him known. There was certainly no malice of intent.

That's not to say it hasn't been difficult. Where is our sanctuary from the changes of the world? The one place most of us have taken for a haven from the rapid transitions of life has been the church. There are some churches that by their very architecture take us back to the 17th century and it is a safe and reassuring feeling even if it was not a safe and reassuring time to be in. But God is both unchangeable and vital, not static. Revelations happen, they are not necessarily changes. The longer you live with someone the more you begin to know and understand them. Why do we suppose it is not the same for God. While we suppose God is unchanging do we also suppose we know all there is to an omnipotent, omniscient, omnificent, omnipresent, God? We just prayed to a God of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things.

Before the great awakening of Moses we hear about in our Old Testament lesson the people worshipped many gods like the Baal of Peor, and golden idols as if an omnipotent God could be contained in something assembled by man. The religions that have lasted over time have all been those that have taught the basic statutes

that Moses has given them. Love God with your whole heart mind and soul. As Paul says in I Corinthians 13 things will change but three things will remain faith hope and love. And since God is love we have a constant.

The statements we have that Jesus made are the treasures of this faith but they are minimalistic. That's not a bad word that is a really, really good word. It means the core, the essence.

Let me explain using music. When a composer sits down to write a piece of music, for instance, "Bolero." Ravel first writes a theme or melody. Most of us know the theme of that piece. Then he adds a little rhythm. As it repeats other instruments are added until we get to the end and everyone it seems who owns an instrument in the orchestra is playing their hearts out with accompanying phrases. Trombones are blaring, trumpets are screaming, tympanis are pounding, it's just wonderful glorious mess. Jesus makes a statement: "Love God with your heart mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself." Hey gang let's build a church and make some rules for loving God and our neighbors as ourselves. It's when the building becomes more important than God for whom it was constructed. Or when the orchestration becomes more important than the theme or the show becomes more important than the story. The problem is when the tradition becomes more important than the teaching.

Moses says, "I am about to offer laws to live by. "We know the Ten commandments do we also know that humans, scribes and Pharisees decided that was too simple and so they made 620 laws or way to obey the ten. And those 620 to quote the Fiddler on the Roof became traditions. The prophet Micah in his minimalist statement said, all the Lord requires of us is that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Don't get me wrong: I am a traditionalist. I love all this. Like Elof Johnson I hope to do it until the Lord takes me home. Someone once said, "close the churches and sell them all and give the money to the poor." The then Arch Bishop Lord Ramsey simply said, "And then what?" There would still be the poor and who would care? Who would know how much some people loved the Lord so that they would build these buildings for the greater glory of God. Who would know that some people loved the Lord and so they wrote these beautiful hymns we sing? Who would know that some people loved the Lord so much that they gave of their time and effort to come on the day of resurrection and praise the Lord of life and love? Who would know that these very people would organize and feed the hungry, clothed the naked, heal the sick and visited the lonely. Who would know? From what I have seen outside these walls, some, but not many.

The scribes and the Pharisees thought the ceremonial hand and pot washing was more important than loving their God and their neighbor as themselves. Sometimes we have to get dirty hands to do what the Lord commands us to do but a clean heart filled with love is more important than right tradition anytime. James told us what true religion is and lets not forget it. Amen!!!