

Pentecost III - Marriage Equality Celebration

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And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' Luke 7:50

So, Gretchen and I had a deal: if the anti-marriage amendment passed in the legislature on Thursday, or if there was another postponement, she would preach today. If we defeated the amendment, I would preach. (This is the kind of deal you get to make if you are the rector.)

And so, here I am. Because we won. As **The Globe** said, *Right of Gays to Marry Secure for Years*. After 3 1/2 years of active struggle, controversy, a roller coaster of excitement and depression, the triumphs of Goodridge and May 17th, with all the setbacks and new challenges and surprises and cliffhangers surrounding those peak moments, here we are. *Right of Gays to Marry Secure for Years*.

As Gretchen would doubtless say, and I'll say it for her, *How great is that?*

I still can't completely believe it, can't comprehend it fully. But it's true. The forces of homophobia, discrimination, exclusion, and intolerance have suffered a major setback. They don't know what to do next. As Kris Mineau strangely said to The Globe on Friday, "We don't have a 12 step program for recovery." I said to Sam, "Does this mean they are addicted to hate, or what?"

So, I was busy earlier this week when I would normally have been studying the readings and meditating about my sermon. When we won on Thursday and I was up to preach, I hadn't even looked at the lectionary. "Well," Gretchen said, "It doesn't matter what the readings are, does it? We won!"

But we are Anglicans, the people of the book. Of course the readings matter. And as I have experienced many times, the readings seem often to be sent by God to comment on the events of the day. When I finally settled down to look, I discovered that the Gospel for today is, of course, the story of the woman who anoints Jesus.

This is the biblical woman who has claimed me. She took possession of me some years ago, and I have written a series of poems about her: her life, her choices, her ministry to Jesus. She appears in all four Gospels; this woman who commits the bold and visionary and compassionate act of anointing Jesus.

Because she appears in all the Gospels, and *because she is a woman*, the probability seems high that this extraordinary event actually happened. Luke's version is not my favorite – Luke makes the woman into a sinner, a prostitute, conflating her, presumably, with Mary Magdalene. But in Mark, the oldest, the original Gospel, she is nameless, an unknown woman. That makes her all the more remarkable, and brave – a stranger and a woman entering a roomful of men and approaching and anointing their leader.

The four gospel writers present her in different ways and attach different teachings to her. Here, Luke has a teaching about love and forgiveness; because the woman has been forgiven much, she will love much. The other Gospelists take the opportunity to comment on the poor (who will be always with us and will always need our compassion) while at the same time noting that Jesus needs and deserves attention then and there.

Well, the teachings are what they are, and will always be with us. But it is the woman herself who haunts me. When I first began to think and pray and write about her, I was focused on her compulsion to commit an individual and personal act of healing. I thought of her *need to get into that room*, as I had once felt called and compelled to get into the room of a man I loved who was dying, a room where many might have said I did not belong. I saw her as my biblical alter ego, a persona in whose voice I could write about mysterious, unsanctioned connections– the one she felt for Jesus, the one I felt for my friend– in whose voice I could write about resolve, determination, faithfulness, about a deep love that transcends convention and even understanding.

But as I have lived and worked and prayed with this nameless woman over the years, I have come to see her in a broader and more public light. I have come to see her as a prophet. Prophets are not simply people who can see and predict the future, like fortune tellers, though that's a popular way of thinking about them. Prophets are folk who see deeply into the heart of our social world; who see the brokenness, who see the injustice, who see the need for healing, and who are compelled to proclaim what they see and to work for the repair of the world.

The woman who anoints Jesus sees all these things. She sees that Jesus is soon to be arrested and to die; therefore she anoints him, as it was customary to anoint bodies for burial. She sees the deep sorrow of the world, and weeps continually. She sees Jesus' need to be healed himself, and heals him with her tears. And she does all this in the face

of misunderstanding, disapproval, and prejudice. *She gets into the room*, and she does it all. *How great is that?*

To me this nameless woman has come to exemplify and to incorporate the dimensions of prophetic ministry: feeling and conviction, faith and action. This Gospel from Luke, while it is not my favorite, does highlight the passion of her act: she weeps and weeps, she bathes Jesus' feet in tears, she anoints him with her tears as well as with oil from the alabaster jar.

In any movement for social justice, such as the one in which we have been engaged for marriage equality, so many tears are shed. Indeed, it is the tears of sorrow, of deep pain for the brokenness of the world, that impels us into action. The tears of the LGBT community for the countless cruelties and exclusions and rejections inflicted upon them over the years. The denial of not only their rights but their humanity. These tears have watered the movement, these deep sorrows have transformed the hearts of the oppressed and the marginalized, and the hearts of those who have been drawn into this struggle.

And in any movement for social justice, the oppressed and marginalized must become emboldened. As the nameless woman was emboldened. Those who have been excluded must become resolved to *get into the room*: the room where truth is spoken to power, the room where the consciences of well-meaning men and women are charged with their responsibility to the lost, the least, and the left behind. And as we move into that room, we are more and more deeply impressed, as Jeff Mello once eloquently said to me, impressed with *the magnitude of what has been withheld*.

In the case of marriage equality, what has been withheld is named as all those rights and responsibilities that go with marriage. But it's much more than that. The magnitude is humanity, full humanity. That is what has been withheld, and is no longer, thanks to the courage and the conversion of our legislature and our governor, thanks to the passionate and unremitting work of so many, many people over so many, many years.

What is most deeply prophetic about the nameless woman, I believe, is that she sees Jesus completely, for who he is, in all his naked need, his fully humanity, his sorrow. She sees his destiny. .

And he sees her. Her faith, her love, her full humanity. Together, they make something whole.

As we have made something whole this week in this Commonwealth. We have made justice whole, equality whole, love whole, in ways they have not been before. Our work is not yet done.

But because we have done what we have done, because we have made something whole, we are equipped for the next steps in our journey to repair the world. We have acted on our faith, and our faith has saved us. We go in peace.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen