

Our First and Last Resort

August 27, 2006

(Pentecost 12 - Year B)

John 6: 60-69

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Last Monday afternoon, I was in my office here at the church. I was in the church offices alone and the doors were all open. My phone rang and, As I answered the phone, I saw a man, obviously a homeless man, come into the area outside of my office. Yet, I propped my feet up and began a long phone conversation with a friend.

But, the homeless man got a chair and sat down just outside my office. I saw this man sitting outside and thought to myself: "After a while, certainly he'll get tired of waiting, then he'll leave."

But, he never did leave. So, when I hung up from my long phone call, I got up and introduced myself to the man who had been sitting at my office door. His name was Mike Cheeks. He was originally from Lampasas. And, the only thing that this man had with him was a manila folder, and that folder contained his Medicare card, a phone card with no money on it and a few pieces of paper that identified him.

After listening to Mike's story, I realized that he had walked to St. Alban's and that he had no place to go and no way to get anywhere.

Now, I will say that thoughts did run through my mind that Mike might have a weapon of some sort, Or, that I might be in some sort of danger

But, at the time, the only thing I could think was: This man is stuck here.

He has no place to go.

And, even if he did have a place to go, he has no way to get there.

I gave Mike a glass of water, and I went into my office to call Mission Waco.

Mission Waco could take Mike in for the night, but they could not feed him.

So, then Mission Waco referred me to the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army could take Mike in for up to 3 nights and could feed him.

But, he would have to be there by 5pm, and it was already 4:45.

Even if I could have called a cab or found a bus for Mike, he would not have made it to the Salvation Army in time.

So, I put away the things in my office,

I shut down my computer,

And, I told Mike that I would drive him down to the Salvation Army myself.

What choice did I have?

Mike Cheeks had found his way to St. Alban's, with no way to get anywhere.

To whom could he go?

I drove Mike down to the Salvation Army in my car.

We had a very nice conversation, and he told me that he thought that I looked a lot like the Jeff Fisher who is the coach of the Tennessee Titans!

I left him in the care of the Salvation Army, along with a \$20 bill.

With tears in his eyes, he thanked me, and I drove off.

My encounter with Mike Cheeks might seem noble, or maybe foolhardy. But, in reality, it was quite simple.

Mike Cheeks had come to St. Alban's because he had no place to go.

To whom else could he go?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches his followers that he is the bread of

life, which is better than manna or Austin bread.
Jesus teaches them that you must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to live forever.

Yet, this teaching is difficult, especially the part about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, which comes very close to sounding like cannibalism.

“Because of this [teaching], many of the disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus.”

So, Jesus asks the twelve disciples:

“Do you also wish to go away?”

And, Simon Peter answers:

“Lord, to whom can we go?

You have the words of eternal life.”

For Simon Peter, his last resort is Jesus Christ.

For Mike Cheeks, his last resort is also Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is found in Jesus’ Church.

This coming week is the one year anniversary of the disaster of Hurricane Katrina.

At this time last year, I was serving at a church in Houston, when thousands of evacuees began pouring into the city.

It did not take long for us to realize that these people from Louisiana and Mississippi were asking:

“Lord, to whom can we go?”

And, it was the churches, it was the Body of Christ, that became a place of last resort, working to house and feed and clothe the people who were stuck, with no place to turn to and no way to get there.

Even today, one year later, it is the Episcopal Church, through Episcopal Relief and Development, who is running Camp Coast Care in Mississippi,

A place serving the needs of the victims on the still-devastated Gulf Coast.

Quite often, I hear people, especially young people, say:
“I don’t really like to go to church.
Church is boring.”

I find this hard to understand because I don’t find the Church to be boring at all.

For, to me, the Church is the Body of Christ.

The Church is where the homeless man appears outside my office.

The Church is where the hurricane victims come looking for baby formula and bottled water.

The Church is where the drug dealers, the minimum wage workers, the unwed mothers, the spiritually hungry, the indolent rich, all come, looking for Jesus and saying:

“Lord, to whom else can we go?
You have the words of eternal life.”

Our first and last resort is always Jesus and his Church.

And, to me, there is certainly nothing boring about the Church or this man named Jesus.

For, there is nothing boring about a man who let a prostitute rub his feet and who kept a wedding reception hopping by turning water into wine.

There is nothing boring about a man who walks on water and who tells off the religious authorities.

There is nothing boring about a man who was unjustly convicted of a crime and given capital punishment on the hard wood of the Cross.

And, this Cross of Jesus Christ is the *ultimate* place of last resort.

Betrayed with a kiss, spat upon, beaten with a whip, abandoned by his friends,

The Son of God hangs on the Cross and prays his prayer of last resort:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”¹

For, my brothers and sisters, on the Cross, God knows what it is like to be in the place of last resort.

¹ Mark 5:34

On the Cross, God knows what it is like to be stuck, with no place to turn to and no way to get there.

So, my friends, “we will cling to the old rugged Cross and exchange it some day for a crown.”²

And as we cling to that old rugged cross,

Jesus asks each one of us:

“Do you also wish to go away?”

And, to Jesus, we reply:

“Lord, to whom can we go?

You have the words of eternal life.”

AMEN.

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² From the hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” by George Bennard