

Truth Teller

November 12, 2006

(Pentecost 23 - Year B)

Hebrews 9: 24-28

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

In the Book of Hebrews, we read this morning about Jesus, our great high priest.

In the Jewish tradition, the high priest entered the sanctuary, the Holy Place in the Temple, and offered animal sacrifices.

The priest offered the animal as a stand-in for all the other people.

The people might not be able to tell the truth about their own sinfulness.

But, instead, the priest would carry the truth of their sin into the Holy Place.

For, one of the classic definitions of a priest is that a priest stands in the midst of his or her congregation and is a truth teller.

The prophets in the Old Testament: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, they all stood in the midst of the Hebrew people and told the truth about hypocrisy.

Martin Luther King, Jr. stood in the midst of a segregated America and told the truth about racism.

Jesus, the great high priest, stood in the midst of God's chosen people and told the truth about sacrifice and love.

And, in this past week, in this great priestly tradition of truth telling, St. Alban's Episcopal Church has stood in the midst of the Waco community, and told the truth about *our* ministry.

Specifically, we have told the truth about St. Alban's Memorial School.

One of the truths that we have told this week is of the wonderful legacy of this School.

We have a strong legacy, remembered through a group of people in this church who went to St. Alban's School as children, or who sent their children to this School.

These children received a wonderful, nurturing and loving education.

But, the truth also is that a School cannot survive only on the power and

energy of memories and nostalgia.

And, the sad truth is that there are 88 students who are now looking for a new school.

There are 19 teachers and staff who have lost their jobs.

And, there is a small, but significant, handful of families in this church who have children and grandchildren who currently attend St. Alban's School.

This week has been the most painful for all of the children and adults affected.

Their grief and loss is real.

And, it is to them that we offer our most sincere hugs and sympathies.

But, the truth is that, for many in this congregation, the fire of ministry that founded the School in 1947 burned out long ago.

I don't tell you this to make you feel guilty or to blame yourself or others.

We just need to tell the truth.

And, the truth is that St. Alban's Episcopal Church has had a 59 year ministry to children in this community.

Most churches can barely keep a ministry alive for 3 years or 9 years, much less 59 years.

The truth is that there are *thousands* of people in the Waco community and beyond who were educated and formed and loved within these walls, who went to chapel in this church, who learned about Jesus from us.

The truth is that Marcia Anderson, our Head of School, has led this school professionally, courageously and lovingly, under very difficult circumstances.

The truth is that we have *so much* to celebrate and remember and love about who we are and what we have accomplished on this little corner of Waco Drive and North 30th Street.

Yet, this ministry has now come to an end.

Now, I realize that there are those in the congregation today who might be new to us or who don't really need to hear all this stuff about the closure of St. Alban's School.

Fair enough.

We cannot become so consumed by our own losses, as individuals, or as a community, that we forget that the Church is always about living in and transforming the world.

In paying attention to the rest of the world this week,

I did find it interesting that the news release of the closure of St. Alban's Memorial School occurred on the very same day as the news of the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld and of the divorce of Britney Spears and Kevin Federline.

This interesting combination of news is a bit challenging to make sense of, theologically.

But, the common thread is that sometimes the truth is *so* obvious and *so* inevitable that it makes you wonder:

“Why hasn't this happened already?”

And, I bet that there are some of you here today who need to face the facts and tell the truth about things in your own life.

Things in your life that should have happened a *long time ago*, but you have just been too afraid to admit the truth.

Maybe the truth is that you should have taken your last drink a long time ago, but you have been afraid to face your cross.

So, let this day be your day to tell the truth.

An Alcoholics Anonymous group meets here today and every Sunday at 2 o'clock in the Youth Room.

Maybe the truth is that you should have quit your miserable job a long time ago, but you have been afraid to face your cross.

So, let this day be your day to tell the truth.

Get to work on your resume and pray, seeking God's passion and vocation for your life.

If we stand in the midst of the congregation and tell the truth,

If we have the courage to recognize what was inevitable and should have
already happened,
If we are willing to prune the dead branches away,
Then, the truth is that God will lead us into new life.

One of the things that has encouraged and energized me in this last week
is this:

As I speak to folks in this parish regarding the news about St. Alban's
School,

We review all the facts, the figures,

We cover the issues of loss and grief,

Then, what I am hearing over and over again from you is this:

What now?

What are we going to do with that school facility?

What is next?

The answer to these questions, my friends is this:

We *are* going to do something.

We are going to do something *big* for God and for God's people.

We will use these next few months to celebrate and honor the ministry
that was.

But then, we will *not* let our facility gather cob webs, when there are so
many needs in our community.

I have no idea right now what our new ministry will look like.

But, in 2007, we are going to pray.

We are going to discern.

We are going to research and question and explore and dream and
imagine a new day,

A new day, when St. Alban's is on fire with ministry and mission and
outreach and vision.

In 1947, your first Rector, Charlie Higgins, asked you to serve the
people in this community.

And, God's answer was the ministry of St. Alban's School.

And, in 2007, your tenth Rector will ask you to do the same:
To listen for God's answer, to be a people of service, and to do
something new and significant and meaningful and life-giving.

For, I am not afraid to lead us into the truth and pain of the cross.
I am not afraid to make big, bold choices.
I am not afraid to be your priest, to enter the Holy Place, and to tell the
truth.

In the Book of Hebrews, we learn that Jesus is our *great high* priest.
Jesus has entered into the Holy Place of heaven itself, to appear in the
presence of God and to tell the truth, on our behalf.

Therefore, we do not need to fear whatever truth in our lives needs to be
faced.

We do not fear the death of our bodies, the death of a job, the death of an
addictive lifestyle, the death of a school.

For, on the third day,
We hear the sound of a stone rolling away,
We see a small beam of light piercing into the darkness,
And we feel strong arms of love, pulling us into new life.

AMEN.

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