

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

January 31, 2010

Jeremiah 1:4-10

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

This weekend, for the 18th year, I will convene and preside over an annual meeting at St. Andrews Episcopal Church. 18 years. Who would have thought it possible?

I have to admit, that I am feeling a bit, just a bit of tension as I come to this meeting. Annual meetings always make me nervous. Mostly because I really do like to be in control, and at annual meetings, I never really know for sure what will happen. But, the small tension I am feeling today is nothing compared to the tension I used to feel. I used to worry about everything. I used to worry about the budget. I used to worry about the reports. I used to worry about the election. Back then it seemed everything was an issue. Back then it seemed that some people came to annual meetings expecting a fight. Some acted as if the annual meeting wasn't worth coming to, unless there was a fight, an argument about something. Thank God, that those days are pretty much past. Meetings are meetings so anything can happen. Annual meetings are important, budgets and reports and elections are important. But they are not worth fighting about.

I remind myself, every year, that what we do at the annual meeting is supposed to build up the kingdom of God. What we do is supposed to celebrate and give thanks for what God has done and is doing in our midst. What we do is supposed to enable us to be better ministers of the Gospel. What we do is supposed to equip us to serve the world in the name of Jesus. When we keep this in mind we enter into the meeting with spirit of humility, a spirit calm and peace. When we keep in mind the people in this community and around the world who are truly suffering, the people of Haiti, and Sudan, Somalia, throughout the Middle East and Africa. When we keep in mind the millions in our own community who are facing illness and economic hardship. When we keep in mind the people who are still rebuilding their lives and their community in New Orleans, along the Gulf Coast, and even here in Grand Rapids, we realize how blessed we are. As we gather for our annual meeting this weekend we do so mindful that God has blessed us in order that through us God can bless the world.

The readings for today really are perfect for the people of St. Andrews on the day of our annual meeting.

The Gospel from Luke this weekend is about a homecoming for Jesus. His faith community has gathered to hear him speak. It was not an annual meeting, but it was a special gathering. Jesus has been gaining some fame for the miracles and healings he has performed elsewhere. Now he is coming home. You can picture the scene. There is excitement and anticipation as Jesus comes that Sabbath. Expectations are high. Surely he will perform some wondrous feat here at home. Surely he will thank us for our support. Surely he will do something that we won't want to miss.

The people who gathered in the synagogue that Sabbath were in for a shocking surprise. Instead of performing a great miracle, instead of telling his relatives and lifelong friends how wonderful they were

Jesus “dissed his homies” Instead of telling what they wanted to hear, and showing them what they wanted to see, Jesus told them what they needed to hear. They were enraged. So, enraged, that his own people, the people knew him from the earliest years of his life. wanted to throw Jesus over the cliff.

Part of me is glad that Jesus lived then and not now. Part of me is glad that Jesus lived there and not here. If Jesus were alive today, I just might be tempted to invite him here to preach. The thought of Jesus coming to address our annual meeting would be exciting. I would tell him how wonderful you are. I would tell him how much you do for the diocese and for the community. I would tell him about your commitment to prayer, to service, to hospitality. I would convince him that given all you do and the wonderful people you are, that you were entitled to have him come. Of course, I would never use the word, entitled, but....he would get my drift. Surely he would come.

It is after he accepts the invitation that I grow afraid.

You see, I like to be in control, especially at annual meetings. I like to know what is going to be said, especially on the day of the annual meetings. And, with Jesus, I would never be in control. With Jesus I would not know what was going to be said.

I grow afraid because Jesus just might preach a sermon like he preached that day in Nazareth. He just might diss you, and me. He might make you so enraged that you would want to throw him off the hill. My fear would be that he might do just as he did in the Gospel today. He might just walk through the midst of the crowd and go on his way. My fear would be that this might just enrage you more. Looking around, looking for someone to throw off the cliff, you just might pick me. After all, I was the one who ruined the annual meeting by inviting him. You are mad. Someone has to pay. It might just as well be the rector. If Jesus were coming to be a guest preacher at our annual meeting I think I would have reason to be afraid.

I wonder what Jesus would say that would make us mad enough to want to throw him off the hill. Would he read the reading from Corinthians and challenge us about how loving we are. Does our love hope all things, believe all things, endure all things? Does our love make us patient, kind and just? Do we truly love, not as the world loves, but as God loves? Do we love those whom Jesus loved: The outcast, the refugee, the abandoned, the least the lost and the lonely? Do we love our enemies and those who wish us harm? Do we love those who have betrayed us, those who have let us down, those who have spoken ill of us? Does our love endure in the face of hardship? Might Jesus convict us of a lack of love? Might he tell us that we are nothing but noisy gongs or clanging cymbals? Might Jesus tell us that because we fail to love as he loved, we have gained nothing? Indeed might Jesus tell us that for as great as we think we are, in fact, because our love is so small, we are nothing? What would Jesus say to us about the issues of our day? What would Jesus say about our American culture? About our laws that favor the rich over the poor; laws which favor those who are like us over those who are different; laws that determine who can marry and who cannot? What would Jesus say to us about how we treat the gift of creation? What would Jesus say about the climate change, about the war, about health care, about immigration? What might Jesus say? What would Jesus say to you personally about the way you treat your family? The way you treat your neighbor, the way you treat yourself? Jesus revealed in the synagogue the truth of the people's prejudice. He revealed their depth of their self entitlement. How dare he praise Naaman the Syrian! How

dare he praise the widow of Zarepheth! They were enraged. What sins would Jesus reveal to you that would really enrage you? Would it be the sin of greed, the sin of pride, of resentment, of jealousy, or racism, or vengeance, of selfishness? What is the sermon you don't want Jesus to preach? What is the sermon you need Jesus to preach?

I know the sermon I do not want Jesus to preach. I don't want Jesus to preach about courage, because I know what a coward I am. I know how safe I like to play it. I also do not want Jesus to preach about not judging others, because I know how judgmental I can be toward others. I do not want Jesus to preach about forgiveness, because I know how long I hold a grudge. There are a few other sermons that I know I really don't want to hear. What about you? Do you know the sermons that would most convict you? The sermons that would most enrage you? What are they? What is the sermon that you truly do not wish to hear?

After Jesus preaches, after he enrages us, then comes the grace. In the face of our rage, Jesus offers us the gift of forgiveness. He knows who we are. He knows what we are. He knows our sin. He knows how we fall short. He even knows how angry he can make us. And still he forgives us. Still he invites us to share the Eucharist. Still he gives himself, his body and blood for us to eat and drink. And then, still again he blesses us with more so that we might be a blessing to others. And then, still again, we whom he has forgiven, we whom he has fed, we whom he has blessed, sends us out to serve the world in his name.