

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

April 25, 2010

Easter 4C

Acts 9:36-43

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

It is a very rare occurrence for me to remember a sermon I have preached beyond just a couple of days. In fact, if I am completely honest I probably forget them almost as quickly as you do. Certainly by Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning the sermon I preached on Sunday is already out of my mind. One of those rare occurrences took place however this lent. On the 4th Sunday of Lent, the Gospel was about the woman who brought in a large vase of ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. You may remember that Judas, the apostle who soon would betray Jesus complained that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. You may remember that Judas was not actually concerned with the poor, but was in fact a thief. The line from my sermon that I remember was that Judas was just a penny ante thief. The woman was all in, extravagantly expressing her love for Jesus. Jesus was also all in, betting his life, giving his life fully and completely out of love for God and human kind.

Since that sermon, I have wondered if I am like the woman or Judas. Am I a penny ante thief, or am I extravagant in my love for God. Am I willing to go "all in for God". How do I give myself completely to God. How do I totally bet my life on God?

This weekend was the diocesan convention in Traverse City. At convention, the Episcopal Churches of our area, our diocese gather with our Bishop to pray, to discuss, to plan for our mission of proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ. When we registered for convention, those from the parish, Kathy Brower, BJ Heyboer, Jodi Baron, Don Davies, Donna Johnston and I were given little pins that said 100%. This pins symbolized that this Church, St. Andrews, had given 100% of our financial apportionment to the diocese for our common life and mission. 100%----a nice pin. Is this what it means to be all in, is this what it means to give ourselves totally to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. 100% seems like it is all, total, complete and full.

Well, maybe or maybe not quite. In fact the diocese was not asking us to give 100% of our resources. The diocese only asked us to give 9%. So, even if we give 100% of what we are asked to give, we are not really giving ourselves totally and fully. Yes we are giving sacrificially, yes we are giving as much as we can. But., no matter how fuzzy our math is 9% is not the same as 100%. No matter how fuzzy our figures, We were not really all in.

As I reflected on the scripture readings for the day, a new insight came to me. In Easter we see the transforming power of God. And really, there is some strange transforming power at work in our readings today. The lamb that is slain is transformed into the living shepherd who leads the sheep. Kind of a bizarre image isn't it. Or how about this? The clothes of the martyrs are washed white in the blood of the lamb? How strange is that!!!! Easter is filled with outrageously miraculous transformation. The cross that was an instrument of shameful death for Jesus, is transformed into a glorious instrument of life for all. The tomb becomes a Garden. Death is transformed to life. The day of Jesus death is transformed into Good Friday. Easter is about the miracle of transformation. By the miraculous transforming power of God, a gift of 9% becomes 100%. By the transforming power of God, giving our best, giving all that we can, is going all in.

This is symbolized every Sunday when you bring your gifts to the altar. When you bring your gifts to the altar, you are bringing your self. Whether you bring a can of soup, or a nickel, a quarter, a loaf of bread, a item of clothing, a check for a \$1, \$10, \$100 or \$100,000 your gift is your self giving. And whatever we give is transformed by the transforming power of God into a gift that is total and full. This transforming power extends beyond just gifts of money, or food. Whenever we do or act in a way that serves and praises God, our actions are transformed. Every act of hospitality you show to a stranger, every act of mercy, every act of kindness and justice. Every act that preserves or reclaims an inch of the planet. Every single word of love you speak, every cup of water you share is transformed by the power of God. So that whatever we do, no matter how small, how seemingly insignificant is multiplied and magnified by the power of God. It is transformed and multiplied so that by giving our best, we are giving our all.

So, how do I go all in? How do we go all in? We go all by doing the best we can. No one of us can do it all. But all of us can do something. All of us, whatever our circumstance can give our best. When I do my best I am all in. When I give as much as I can, I am all in. When I laugh, or cry, or work or play, or love, or rest, or taste, or feel, or sing, or listen, or smell to best of my abilities I am all in.

I don't know how long I will remember this sermon. I will probably forget it by this afternoon, maybe by tomorrow, certainly by Tuesday. But no matter when I forget my sermon, no matter when you forget my sermon, my hope and my prayer, is that we always remember that when we give our best we give our all. And may we remember also that when we fail to do our best, that even when you hold back, even when you fail, even when we are not all in for God. God does not hold back and that for you, for us, for creation, God always gives 100%. For you for us, for creation, God is always all in.
