

**The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa**

May 13, 2007

Easter 6C

Acts 14:8-18

Revelation 21:22-22:5

John 14:23-29

Most clergy types have days on which they like to preach, and days that they try to avoid preaching. Most clergy enjoy preaching on Christmas, and Easter and the major holy days. Preaching on these days is usually easy, because on those major holy days, people come to church knowing the main points of the story. Christmas, Jesus was born. Easter Jesus was raised. Now some of the details might not be remembered but people know the general drift of the story. On those days, there is a sense of celebration, most people are in a good mood and they don't really expect a long sermon. On those days, especially Christmas and Easter, people come to church to sing or at least to listen to the music.

There are also Sundays that preachers tend to try to avoid. Holidays are tough. If you don't say something about the Fourth of July or Labor Day, there are some people who will be offended. If you do say too much about the holidays, there are some who will be offended. For me, the Sunday I find most difficult is Mothers Day. It's not that I don't love my mother. I do, very much so. But, the difficulty is that Mother's Day is not a Church Feast Day, and the scripture texts are assigned are for one of the Sundays of the Church year. Usually Mother's Day and the scripture readings just don't match up. So then, do you preach Mother's Day, ignore the scripture and offend those who came to hear about the scriptures, or do you ignore Mother's Day, preach the scripture and offend every mother and grandmother in the congregation.

Such was the anxiety I faced as I began my sermon preparation this week. Whom did I want to offend least? As I read a commentary regarding our Gospel reading today, I found my answer.

In his book, "Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus" Jean Vanier writes this about today's Gospel:

"The peace Jesus promises is not just a balance of forces or an absence of war. It is not just a good feeling inside us, a feeling of centerdness, wholeness, quietness, stillness or inner silence. It is not merely the absence of inner conflicts or desire. No, the peace of Jesus is more than all of these things combined. It is the trust that Jesus is there with us and in us. For Jesus is our Peace. Peace is resting in the Beloved, having total trust in him. It is the peace of a child resting in the tender arms of her mother."

The peace of a child resting in the tender arms of his mother.

30 years ago, when I first went to Florence, I found in a very small museum an etching done by Michelangelo. I bought a print of it, and it has hung on my office wall since. Let me describe it to you. In the print, there is an etching of a woman holding a young child. The woman is just lightly sketched. Her arms are strong. Her eyes are watchful. The infant is there at her breast. It appears that Michelangelo had begun painting the child. There is flesh color to the child's arm and torso. This etching has a crease across the center. Apparently, Michelangelo folded it up and put it aside unfinished.

I can't be sure why it is that Michelangelo left this painting unfinished. But, whatever the reason, as it is, this painting captures for me that image that Vanier was describing in his commentary. The peace of Jesus is the peace of a child resting in the arms of his mother. This painting captures for me the image that our Gospel offers us today. It captures the image of Jesus who is going away and coming. You can see her but just barely. Is she fading away or is she coming to be? The mother is there, but she is not there. The etching captures for me the image of a God who is mother. A God who is strong and protective. A God who is alert and aware. A God who nourishes. A God in whose loving arms we find peace.

As the image of the mother is there in the background of the picture, the image of the child is coming into greater focus. For me, this is the image of the Spirit of Jesus pouring into us, a Spirit that is giving us life. As the child is coming to life, there is the awareness that he or she is being nurtured, he or she is being prepared for a future life. The child cannot rest in its mothers arm forever. He cannot nurse at her breasts forever. She is being prepared for a time when she will be on her own, a time when he will be finding his own way in the world.

The painting reminds us that God gives us life; God nurtures us so that we can be sent forth.

We are nurtured and sent forth by God's Spirit so that we might continue the work Jesus did on earth.

We are nurtured and sent forth with the gifts of the spirit, the gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and faithfulness.

We are nurtured and sent forth with the gifts and talents that each one of us possesses – gifts of music, teaching, building, and growing. Gifts of hospitality, courage, strength, truthfulness, and compassion.

We are nurtured and sent forth so that we might bring the healing of God to those who are broken in body or spirit; to a world crying out for justice.

We are nurtured and sent forth so that we might help God's light, and glory, to be born in our world.

We are nurtured and sent forth so that we might help bring to birth in our world the Peace of Jesus.

We are nurtured and sent forth so that through us, God might bring creation itself to rebirth.

We are nurtured and sent forth so that through us, God might bring all nations and peoples to the glorious city of God.

Dear friends, each Sunday we come forward to take the body and blood of Jesus. As we eat his body and drink his blood, his life becomes part of us. As we eat this bread and drink this cup we are offered his peace. As we come forward to receive this bread and wine this morning, may we remember that as Jesus gives us his body and blood, our loving God also gives us her life. Like a child nursing at his mother's breast, God is pouring her spirit into our lives. May we who are nurtured by our loving God know the peace that only God can give. May we who know this peace, go forth and do the work that God gives us to do.