

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

August 30, 2009

Proper 17B

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-23

One of the delightful gifts of sons growing into young adulthood is getting to know the young women in their lives. As some of you know, our middle son's girl friend lived with Linda and me this past spring. What was most delightful is that while Erin was living with us, Ben was still in Mount Pleasant finishing his degree. It was a gift to get to know Erin as a person, and not just as someone who came along with Ben.

After she graduated this past spring, Erin was offered a teaching position at Marysville High School just south of Port Huron. The weekend after she was offered the position, Erin came to our house, bubbling with excitement about her new job and community. Her only complaint was that when she was scouting out apartments a landlord asked her what she would be teaching. "High school English and History" she said enthusiastically. "Oh, I am sorry, that is too bad", he responded. Erin was beside herself, almost offended by his comment. "What did he mean by that? Why was he sorry? What is "too bad" about teaching high schoolers English and History?

Well, I have to confess I did not say what I was thinking. I did not tell her that as I remember high school my high school classes in English and History I knew what he meant by too bad, and so sorry. Do you remember high school English and History? Do you remember diagramming sentences, and practicing all the rules of grammar? Do you remember memorizing dates and names and places that seemed to be of absolutely no use then, now, or forever? Do you remember papers covered with red ink?

Because I so sadly remember those teachers who made English and History such sorrowful experiences, I more gladly remember the magnificent teachers. I remember Mrs. Willard and Mrs. Brooks who brought history and literature to life for me in high school. I remember college professors: Don Spitzka who spent weeks on the poem Dover Beach, and Tom McInerny who spent almost a whole semester talking about the 1912 presidential election. It was these great teachers whose passion for teaching, for students, and for their subjects helped me to fall in love with history and literature. Our readings this weekend present us with two styles of teachers. In the Gospel, there are the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew that the rules were important. The Pharisees feared that without the rules to govern the Jewish religion, the people would get so sloppy in their faith that they risked losing their faith. The Pharisees, at their best, loved their God, Yahweh, and wanted to be sure that faith in Yahweh would remain strong. But, at their worst the Pharisees fell so much in love with the laws and the rules, that they failed to recognize Yahweh in the flesh. They loved their law so much, that they did not love Jesus. They loved the law so much, they used the law to put God to death..

Jesus knew and kept the rules and the laws. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Jesus came to teach that faith was not about following rules, not about loving laws, but about loving God. Faith for Jesus was about loving that which God loves: God's creation, God's children.

The Song of Solomon, which is our reading from the Hebrew Scripture today is a poem about love. Most believe that it was not originally written about God, but rather was a love song written by lovers to their beloved. Its place in scripture reminds us that God's love is revealed in human love. The song is a

reminder that to love another person is to experience God. The Song of Solomon is not about laws and rules, but about human love in all of its passion. In this song about human love we learn of the passionate love which is at the heart of the relationship between God and God's people.

The Epistle of James was written in the years just after the life of Jesus. In this Epistle, James invites his readers to consider how love is to be lived out. The perfect law of love is enacted not in what we hear, not in what we think, but in how we act. The perfect law of love is not about how well we keep ritual laws of washing pots, cups kettles, or even our hands, but about how pure we keep our hearts. The perfect law of love is fulfilled in keeping ourselves unstained by the violence, the greed, the seductions, the hatred of our world. The perfect law of love is fulfilled by living gratefully and generously. The perfect law of love is fulfilled when we are mindful of the words we speak. The perfect law of love is fulfilled when we care for widows and orphans.

Dear friends, today we give thanks for teachers. We give thanks for those who taught us how to diagram sentences, those who taught us the rules of grammar, those who helped us memorize all those dates, and all those persons who were important in history. Today we give thanks for those teachers whose passion helped bring English, and History and Math, and Chemistry, and Physics, and Business and Music, and every other subject to life. Friends, today we give thanks for those who taught us the rules, and commandments and traditions of our faith. We give thanks for those whose passion helped bring our faith to life, those whose passion for God taught us how to love God, others and our self. We pray that we might live what we have learned. May we love our self and others as beloved daughters and sons of God. May we be grateful. May we be generous. May we be unstained by the world. May we care for widows and orphans. May we love as God loves, not only in hearing and in keeping laws. May our love be lived in action.