

August 25, 2013

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 13:10-17

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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Celebration of Ministries Sunday is a great day around here. It isn't a day where we celebrate the wider Anglican or Christian Church, or the historical church or the international church. This isn't the day where we celebrate the significant holy moments in the life of Christ.

Instead, it is a day where we pause for a moment and look around. Not inward or outward or across time and space, just around. It is a day where we can take a moment to pat ourselves on the back, to pat each other on the back. We can appreciate and enjoy the energy that this place sustains day after day, season after season, year after year.

This is a day when we can shamelessly and hopefully love All Saints'. It is a good day. It is a good day because it is good to be reminded of how involved we are, and it is good to be reminded that there is so much happening. It is good to be reminded that your little corner of the parish is not the only corner of the parish. As big as our parish is, it is good to be reminded that we are a community of communities, that we are connected through virtue of our interests, our passions, our life circumstances. We are tightly woven and inter-reliant.

It is a good day for those of us who give their professional lives to this place to remember that, even amidst the planning, the calendars, the meetings and the minutiae of our day-to-day time here, there is a larger whole, there is a parish made up of people not just a list of tasks to get done. We need those reminders from time to time.

I believe we need days like this from time to time. We need days when we can just rest in something good, even if it isn't perfect, to help us hang on to the goodness that surely must be out there.

Because friends, the goodness out there is getting harder and harder to believe in.

McNair Learning Academy is just a few miles from my house. There are many ways in which McNair students and my kids are very different. But there are many fundamental ways in which they are very much the same. For starters, they are children and they are innocent.

They believe in their school and in their teachers. They blindly trust their parents to send them somewhere each day where they will learn some stuff, hang out with some friends, eat some lunch, play outside and come home largely unscathed.

Their teachers come to work assuming that they are in an emotionally taxing and mentally draining but physically safe environment.

The parents of kids at McNair are different from me and my husband and my friends in many ways, but in many things we are fundamentally the same. We watch our hearts climb out of the car or onto the school bus each day, some days grateful for a break but every day with a prayer under our breaths that they will return to us more or less in the unblemished state in which we are letting them go.

At some time in the course of recent history, the innocence of children and the trusting of parents became an acceptable dumping ground for misguided rage, unchecked mental illness, and political showmanship. And bullets. Fired from guns. In schools full of our kids.

This is, of course, unacceptable.

I'm not sure what the answer is, though I have my own ideas. I do know, however, that we MUST figure out how to take my children, my friends' children and the children of people whose neighborhoods you avoid out of the line of fire.

The media keeps repeating that no one at McNair was hurt. This deep untruth grates my nerves. 870 students, their teachers and their parents were wounded, deeply. They will be scarred to varying degrees for the rest of their lives because that central place of safety, learning, and community is no longer safe. That is shattering to me from a couple of miles away, I can't imagine how the parents and children involved in the event will begin the process of healing from their injuries.

They are children. It is our job to protect them. There is nothing else that deserves our protection above them. Nothing.

It is a grim state of affairs. Every single time someone walks into a school with a gun, my ability to see goodness in the world blurs just a little.

And so I need—and I think we need—days like this. We need places like this sacred place. We need to be reminded, as our reading from Hebrews brings this morning, that we are part of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We are part of God's kingdom, even when it is hard to see or believe or remember.

We come to this place for solace, for rest, for renewal. We come for strength to fight and to be challenged into action. We come to join and to be supported and to be pulled in and held tight. We come here for comfort.

And today, I am here in order to be reminded and then remind you that God's kingdom cannot be shaken.

We have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet. We are, today and every day, approaching something holy that needs to be held, nourished and raised up. Sometimes that untouchable something can be found within ourselves. Sometimes, more often, in my experience, it is found in other people, those we surround ourselves with when nothing makes sense, those who-- when our vision of goodness is blurred—remind us that God is indeed good. All the time.

Antoinette Tuff knows that God is good. And somehow, last Tuesday, she was able to remember that God's goodness is most obviously manifest in the space between people. She nurtured that space, she cared for that sick, damaged, death-bound individual that came into her school to hurt her children. And through that courageous but largely simple act, she saved lives.

I don't know what church Antoinette Tuff goes to. I imagine she goes to a church that is different from this one in many respects. But I'm fairly certain it is similar in many fundamental ways. They too are members of this Kingdom, God's kingdom, that will not be shaken. They, too, come to church for solace and support and strength. In Antoinette and perhaps in many of their other parishioners, they have insured that God's goodness will be seen, even when the world's goodness is blurred.

We do that, too. and we must keep at it. we must continue to teach one another the power of God in relationship. We must continue to fight to keep our children safe from those who would shatter their worlds or end their lives.

Today is a day to celebrate. We celebrate our ministries and our fellowship. We celebrate our service and our vision. I hope we all get elbow strain patting ourselves and each other on the back. The work here is good and holy. We work to make sure God's goodness is seen, too. We have been for over a hundred years. We have generations to go.