

WILL YOU BE RAISED WITH ME?

Matthew 4:1-11
The First Sunday in Lent
March 9, 2014
All Saints', Atlanta, Georgia

I know that some of you have grown up in the Anglican Tradition of the Episcopal Church, but that many of you did not. And if you did not grow up inhaling this slightly rarified air, then you might well remember your first experience or two of Anglican worship. Perhaps you were entranced and perhaps you were put off, but either way, you knew that what we do here is not immediately accessible and easy to grasp. The reality is that however much we invest in making this worship easier to follow with printed bulletins, introductory classes, pithy pamphlets and the like, it is still not immediately accessible for most of us the first few times we try.. There is a reason for this lack of immediacy *in toto*, and it is not that we enjoy being obscure. The reason that our worship is rarely immediately accessible as a whole to most of us is that it is designed to be the worship of a lifetime. It is rich and multi-layered. There are a lot of words which sometimes we have to allow to simply wash over us as we access the even more affective reality of what we do with our bodies, for example. As we orient ourselves over and over, or as we are turned again and again to that which is of ultimate worth and to what really matters, we read a lot of scripture and enjoy a lot of words and music. These

have widely varying styles and history, as do our prayers ancient and modern as we align ourselves with Christians across the world and down the ages. Many who have been faithful here for years will testify to the experience of hearing something that we have heard many times before almost as if it were the first time, and finding aspects of our worship speaking in ways we have long forgotten but with a newness of life that is, itself, a gift of grace.

Over the past year or so, the silence we observe at the breaking of the bread has taken on a growing importance for me. I have long understood that silence as the three days in the tomb, the time between Jesus being lifted on the cross, sometimes signed by the Presiding Priest with the bread and wine at the end of the Great Thanksgiving. This is followed by the central prayer of our faith, the Lord's Prayer, and then the breaking of bread. Broken, crucified, the many ways large and small by which we do violence to one another appearing to hold sway, sin, degradation and death all marked and acknowledged, even as we pray that most terrifying of prayers—"Thy will be done"—and then silence. Not for long, but for long enough to be the question of faith. Our Lord is in the tomb. Will you put your whole trust in God's grace and love? Will you then be raised with Jesus? Will you allow the power of God working in you to do

infinitely more than you can ask or imagine? Will you once again say “YES” to life, “YES” to hope, “YES” to the God who is ever-faithful to you?

That silence is the silence of the three days in the tomb. But it is also the silence of the cross after Jesus bowed his head and died. Before that, the silence is the silence of Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Is it possible that there is some other way this story could end than in death? Is there any other way of integrity open to him, he asks. Can he go on trusting that the one who gave life in the first place is trustworthy for life even in the face of death? Those are all questions of the silence.

And even they are preceded by a multitude of other times when the question of faith is asked: will you, friend, put your whole trust in my grace and love? Those questions are the temptations which Jesus met in the silence and solitude of the wilderness. Those are the questions we hear when we are living awake and alive and conscious, and when we are resisting the sway of deathliness in our lives. Those temptations are also the questions of the silence when we break bread together.

We might not be tempted to turn stones into bread. In fact we are more likely to turn butter into guns. Can we forgo our own self protection at the expense of others?

Can we live without putting others down, without ganging up, without gossip? We do not live by guns, and we do not live by violence. No more do we live by bread alone, but by the Word calling us to courage in the face of our fears, to finding ourselves in those days when we feel as though we are losing ourselves in some way; the Word calling us to trust in God alone for life and discovering through our most real fears that we are granted life in abundance and are more fully who we were created to be. Small actions of trust build trust and we can live from strength to strength when we say a sober “Yes” in the silence and look to be re-membered, put back together anew, even as we remember what really matters for life.

We might not be tempted to throw ourselves off any pinnacles. We would likely be afraid of dying. We are more likely to do what we call tempting fate, hoping against hope that we will be alright even as we do things that we know are bad for us, things we know we will need to confess. We listed them in our Litany of Penitence last Wednesday: “our self-indulgent appetites and ways...our intemperate love of worldly comforts...our dishonesty in daily life and work...our negligence in prayer and worship...our failure to commend the faith that is in us...” In the silence can we say “I will not put the Lord God to the test”?

The temptation to power is more immediately close to where many of us live and it is really a temptation to idolatry. We are going to love something, however perverted that love might be. Idolatry is when we love things that do not matter in the end: golden calves and baubles and trinkets; military hardware and the threat of destructive power over others, always justified as defensive; simple superiority over our spouse or partner whom we fear might be better than us and we feel criticized. The desire to be right rather than to be in relationship. All idolatry. All worshiping the wrong thing. All part and parcel of Jesus' cross and our own brokenness. And in the silence after the fraction, the breaking of bread, we might say: "Away with you Satan. Worship God and God alone. Yes, Lord, I will trust in your grace and be raised with Jesus once again."

Temptation, Gethsemane, Calvary: Always the question: do you choose life? The brokenness of the cross, the sickening reality of our fractured lives and Jesus' broken body in the breaking of the bread. The silence of the tomb, with all its questions: Will you put your whole trust in my Grace and Love? Will you be raised with Jesus? And finally, Easter. Costly Grace. Yes, Lord. "Christ our Passover IS sacrificed for us." And so we keep the feast of the Kingdom, the first fruits of this new and renewed humanity brought into being in and through us, and we gather around the table amidst gifts freely offered and gratefully received, amidst all sorts and conditions of humanity, all seeking

the abundant life of keeping in mind what really matters and knowing that Love is stronger than Death.

In a brief silence, a foretaste of the silence of the tomb, let us respond to the gospel in prayer...