

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

June 21, 2015; the 4th Sunday after Pentecost.

Readings: 1 Samuel 17: 1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2
Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41.

The Spirituality of Life

A number of important events occurred in the last week, which we heard about in the news; two in particular, one tragic and one hopeful. The tragedy being the shooting and killing of nine people at prayer in a historically black church in South Carolina, and the hopeful one being Pope Francis' message to the Catholic Church and the people of the world to take seriously the urgent need to care for the environment...and of course, both events contain tragedy and hope within their stories, which are on-going.

Both of these events, and countless others that occurred in the last last week, are important to God and to us, and this is, to some, the controversial piece for today's sermon: we need to be about such matters here in church; consider where God is in all this and how we are called to act as people who follow the Way of Jesus in this time and place.

How could this be controversial?

Because some see this setting as being spiritual to the exclusion matters often labeled as political or economic in the public square.

In August, during our forum times after the services on the 2nd and 9th, Joella Rhodes, one of our church members and a spiritual director, and I will be presenting on the topic of "Prayer and the Spirituality of Life."

I spent some time thinking of the title of the forums; I knew what we want to present, but how to describe it in a few words.

Often we hear about “the Spiritual Life”, and though the people using those words probably don’t mean it this way, that is often understood as the life we that we have when we come to church or when we pray...a life that is different or separate from our everyday life.

“I want to have a good spiritual life; I really need to pray more or go to church every week.” ...one might say or think.

Certainly praying and going to church does help to deepen our relationship with God, and equip us to be the people God is calling us to be...but God is with us and about every part of our lives, every moment of our lives, and is most known and experienced in the moment in which we live, in the present...whether you are in church or in school or at work or at home.

There is no spiritual life apart from or separate or different than “life.”

This why I like to speak about the “spirituality of life.”

All of life in the world, in the body, is spiritual and has eternal significance, and is important to God.

You know this; we are about this here at Holy Comforter.

Just this past week during our Wednesday Night program on ‘Generations’ (how the various generations relate to church),

it was mentioned that in this church we make connections...we connect what is going on in the world with what we are about here, what we believe about God, and how we want to live as Christians every day.

It seems normal to us, though it might not always be easy to do in the moment.

It never has been.

Consider our Gospel account for today.

When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat.... A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat,... [the boat was filling with water]. But [Jesus was asleep]..., "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Was Jesus going to be there for his friends even on a boat, in a storm?
He wasn't teaching them or sharing bread with them or talking about prayer.

Did he care?

Did he care about the daily struggle and the moment of crisis?

Would Jesus be there for them; wherever they found themselves?

Does following the Way of Jesus make a difference day to day, moment to moment?

This Gospel account speaks to me of God's presence in the every-day experience of life.

Jesus was right there, and they weren't sure he was going to care about this storm.

Is it any surprise that many wonder...what is God's role in my day, every day...is God here...does God care?

But they do call on Jesus, and he shows that he does care, that he is there for them in the storm and that all of life is his/God's/the Spirit's concern.

There is no separation between what is spiritual and what is political;
between what is spiritual and what is caring for creation; there is no separation between what is of spiritual importance

and how much we need to deal with
racism.

Everything is spiritual---the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament, are perhaps more clear on that point.

In the story of David and Goliath, we hear detail and description because the writers of this account believed, knew that God was part of it all...now exactly how, that is harder to know...and we all get that wrong from time to time...it takes discernment to decide how God is involved and how God wants us to move forward...the Bible shows us that again and again as well.

Our faith and the faith from which we came, Judaism, states clearly that God is Creator of all, therefore all of life, every detail is important to God, and therefore important to us and of concern to us in church.

But not everyone believes this.

A politician who is Roman Catholic, and it doesn't matter which one because many believe what he said, in response to Pope Francis' direction to the Church to educate and take steps to care for creation, said: "I don't go to Mass for economic policy or for things in politics."¹ and "I think religion ought to be about making us better as people, and less about things that end up getting into the political realm."²

Really? Doesn't that just make you crazy to hear that?

As if we can be better people by cutting ourselves off from the world around us as people of faith.

I share these quotations not because they tell us something about one

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<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2015/06/17/jeb-bush-i-dont-go-to-mass-for-economic-policy-or-for-things-in-politics/>

2

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2015/06/18/top-cardinal-says-jeb-bush-is-wrong-about-the-link-between-faith-and-politics/>

person, but because they tell us something about what many think. And that is what many people who don't come to church think about us-- that we are just here praying for ourselves and not engaged with what matters to them.

But separating the spiritual from the political and economic was standard for a long time.

We think differently in this church.

There is no separation between what is spiritual and what is political and what is economic.

God calls us to be stewards of the earth for the good of creation and the good of all people.

As Pope Francis says, the poor are most hurt when we don't care for creation.

Everything is connected and important to God.

The other event of the past week, the shooting in Charleston, SC, at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, necessitates us saying in church, loudly, that Black Lives Matter.

Eight died on the scene and one at the hospital later, in what was immediately being called a hate crime, all the victims being black and the shooter being white.

What becomes more controversial and I've seen this in the news, when we start, once again, to dig just below the surface of this one act, to look at the history of racism that fueled it and so many other shootings, just in the past year of African

Americans...we need to say, in this church and every church, Black Lives Matter, and pray to God about how we can be part of the solution to hate and violence, and how we can be part of the need to act for racial reconciliation and justice for all.

And what does racial reconciliation mean?

I was asked this by a person who wants it and wonders if it is even possible...and what would it look like?

It means many things, but theologically, it certainly means that we will be reconciled as God's children and live together as God intended us to live together, as God intended at creation...in love and peace, rejoicing in our diversity, which reflects the image of God to us.

Everything is spiritual, everything is political, everything economic...everything is of God, part of God's creation, and we are God's stewards of it all.

Let us pray:

O God, in You we find our unity, and through your grace we see You in every aspect of our lives and in the life of our world. Help us to bring the resources of our spiritual practices to engage the challenges of our lives and of the wider community; especially we pray today that we may be agents of transformation in matters of racial reconciliation and as stewards of creation. And we pray for the faith to know that you are with us in every storm, ready to help us, with us in our efforts to be your people in this time and place, through the power of the Spirit. *Amen.*