

"Taxi!" Sunday, October 8, 2017  
The Rev. Canon Paul Bresnahan

My dad died when I was eight years old at Christmas and I often needed an adopted father, whether consciously or unconsciously, I'm not sure, but it just seemed to work out that way.

There was, for instance "Suitcase Sam". He was a Jewish fellow who was part of the Conservative Jewish movement in Boston. He earned the nickname "Suitcase Sam" because he carried a rather large "American Tourister" with him in which he carried day old bread to feed the pigeons down by Symphony Hall in Boston on the way to work. He loved the birds. They loved him back. Every day, it was the same thing, thousands of pigeons spotted Sam and flew to him as if we were watching a bad reprise from an Alfred Hitchcock movie. He and I drove for the old Checker Taxi Company. He was known as "Checkah 226", I was Checkah 99". I drove nights in order to help pay my way through seminary. He did too, because he was an elder American who had bills to pay. We adopted one another. By the way, I also drove cab in New York City to help keep ahead of the bills. In those days, working summers or nights like that could help pay tuition, room and board. Nowadays costs for higher education are such that much of that out of reach for so many.

Sam and I were people of faith. Sometimes it was hard to get a minion for Morning Prayer at the Synagogue and Sam would call on me. Over the cab radio there was the crackling sound; "99, Sam needs you at the Synagogue!" It takes 10 to make a minion or quorum. I loved it. I'd listen closely to the Rabbi in a tiny downtown sacred space as he spoke of each sacred word from the Hebrew Bible and we'd discuss our love for the sacred text as the others stayed in the back visiting, sometimes playing cards but certainly not hanging on every word from the rabbi's mouth as Sam and I did. Sam wore his prayer shawl and yarmulke and began to pray. As he recited the Psalter his body swayed to the rhythm of the verses. It is called davening; much like we move liturgically; standing, sitting, kneeling, moving from pew to altar rail and back again. We pray with our bodies. Likewise with Sam; we are all perfectly at one with God in our worship, as we are when we recite today's Psalm

7 The law of the Lord is perfect  
and revives the soul; \*

8 The statutes of the Lord are just  
and rejoice the heart; \*  
the commandment of the Lord is clear  
and gives light to the eyes.

10 More to be desired are they than gold,  
more than much fine gold, \*  
sweeter far than honey,

than honey in the comb.

He loved the Law. It revived his soul. He loved God. He also respected my faith and admonished me to do the same for others. Never attack someone else just because their belief system is different from your own. And so it was with Sam and me and those of us who drove taxis in Boston; Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists and Agnostics alike; we all practiced a kind of tolerance that went beyond that to a profound affection and love for one another. That is what we are all taught in our common faith and humanist traditions. After all, Sam reminded me, wasn't it the Jewish fellow we call Jesus who taught us all to "Love one another!"

Such a spirit. Such a soul as this! Sam loved the law of God. As we are taught to do in our Synagogues, Churches, and Mosques. We are taught the world over to treat one another as we wish to be treated and to do so out of the abundance of God's joy and of love. This is because "God is Love".

The Law begins with the "Shema, Yisrael!"; Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one and you shall Love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all you mind and with all your should and with all your strength. This is Israel's great commandment. And the first four of the Ten Commandment's we recite today are anticipated fulfilled by the Shema. Likewise the remaining 6. They are fulfilled by Jesus are they not. when he quoted Leviticus 19:19, "You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself."

In stark contrast to this the Dream of God we come together today in the wake of violence, disaster, political divisiveness, and racial hatred. Anger has been ramped up in the midst of it all. The Dream of God in so many place of the human soul has become a nightmare from which we seem not to waken.

Now we dread what may come of things between us and the folks in North Korea. The stewardship of that relationship frankly seems to be in hands that fail the most fundamental test of diplomacy, stability, and nuance which is critical to such a potentially dangerous and mercurial relationship. So many souls hang in the balance.

And here you and I find ourselves with the challenge of presenting ourselves to the world as Christians.

Even that's problematic since much of what passes for "Christian" in our contemporary world frankly makes me cringe.

We Episcopalians seem to be swimming in the opposite direction in many ways. The more inclusive we become the fewer folks seem attracted to the proclamation of faith as we have come to understand it.

I am frankly turned off by much of what passes for Christianity around us. I like to think critically about my faith. I like to read, study and discuss it. For me faith is not about judging folks, it is about reaching out to those who have often found themselves on the margins. The Gospel is about the healing of the blind, the lame, the foreign soldier's daughter, the leper. It seems to me that Jesus would seek out those the social order rejected. And yet he was also comfortable around the rich and the powerful. The Gospel has always and will always transcend human categorization. The Gospel has always and will always be about the love of Jesus for everyone on this planet. Period.

I am reminded of the wisecrack Tallulah is reputed to have made when someone asked her if she were a Christian. She spoke openly about being an agnostic, but she loved the worship of the Church especially at Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin on Broadway, "Smokey Marry's" as it is still affectionately known. The vestments, the incense, the bells, the critical thoughtful sermons, the drama of the Eucharist thrilled her and made sense deeply somewhere in her soul. So her friends asked her often, are you a Christian. "Heavens no daaaaling, I'm not a Christian, I'm an Episcopalian!"

Look at this sequence of events in the life of Jesus. First he overturns the tables in the Temple precincts. He confronts the money changers and proclaims that "My house shall be a house of prayer for all people!" Quoting Isaiah 56:7 he made it clear that foreigners and eunuchs were part of what it meant to be included in this "House of Prayer".

Again and again Jesus was there for the blind, the lame, the tax collector, the prostitute, the common fisherfolk of his time. Yet he was likewise at one with the rich as well as the poor. Whether it was a tax collector or a leper, to Jesus there was no distinction.

Where Jesus ran into problems was with the biblical literalists of his day. In today's Gospel it was the chief priests and the Pharisees. Other times it was the scribes and the lawyers, the Sadducees or the Sanhedrin.

And yet it was Jesus who became more and more the voice of the voiceless. So must we. There are those caught in the midst of natural disasters, and acts of violence and hatred. We must be fearless about speaking up for those who are victims. This is how Jesus organized his life.

There are also those not so far away who are forgotten and unserved by any organized efforts.

Now is when I hear the voice of Jesus say;

"Peter, do you love me?."

"Yes, Lord you know that I love you."

"Feed my sheep."

A second time; Jesus asks Peter, the head of the church, the rock the builders rejected

"Peter do you Love me?"

"Yes, Lord you know that I love you."

"Feed my sheep."

A third time Jesus asked Peter "Do you love me?"

Peter was hurt, because he asked the same question now three times, as if by way of emphasis or exaggeration. When seeking to make a point. Jesus often used hyperbole as a vehicle of communication.

"Feed my Lambs, Peter"

We may well be the stones the builders rejected.

Especially as we seek out the marginalized, the outcast, the maimed, and those who need to be fed not only with food from our tables, but with the food of the Angles.

You are the living stones upon which Christ is building this church.

Be of Good Courage, the builders may have rejected this stone and you.

But not so Jesus.

You are the Beloved of God, called to Proclaim the Love of God to ALL!

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, Undivided and Everlasting Trinity.

Amen.

Fr Paul