

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Donald DiXon Williams

RCL: Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21 LM: Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

In the 1950s and early 1960s, my grandfather, Samuel Dixon, lived and worked as an engineer at the McReynolds Building, then located on the corner of 18th and G Streets, N.W., in Washington, D.C. Ironically, the building was just two blocks from the White House and directly across the street from the World Bank. Coming from my other grandfather's home, we drove past the U.S. Capitol building. These three places, then and now, represent in many ways three of the most powerful institutions in the world. But for a 10-year-old boy, they were just places I could ride my go-kart and play with my little brother. I knew that the president of the United States lived at the White House, and I knew that my grandmother worked in one of the Senate office buildings, but I didn't have a clue what was happening at the World Bank. In truth, I am still struggling to keep up with what is happening at the World Bank.

For all of their importance, none of these places was as important to me as the McReynolds Building. In that building, which housed apartments, Blackie's House of Beef restaurant, a barbershop, a grocery store, a shoe repair shop, a drugstore, and a diner, I learned about life, death, work, responsibility, and people.

I also didn't need any money at the McReynolds Building. One of this Sunday's verses, Isaiah 55:1, made me think of those days when I could go to that diner and Miss Edith or "Lil Bits" would fix me the biggest Cherry Coke at the fountain and the best cheeseburger in town. I could go to Mr. Morris at the grocery store, and he would give me anything I needed. I could go to Blackie's and get a steak that would melt in my mouth. Why? Because I was Sam Dixon's grandson, and in a day when segregation was the law, Sam seemed to be almost above the law, and in his own way he changed the law.

There is an old gospel song that says, "If it had not been for the Lord on my side, tell me where would I be, where would I be?" I can say the same thing about my grandfather. I don't know where or what I would be without him, but because of him and the good Lord and a few others, I am now in my own way trying to effect changes in those places near where I played as a child. Congress, the White House, and the World Bank have the capacity to help dig wells for clean water, provide debt relief for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), and provide aid and encourage trade that can improve the situations of people who don't have the resources to feed themselves.

My grandfather recently passed away at the age of 94 years young. I can't think of a better way to honor his memory than to try to help others as I saw him help others—and especially me.

I woke up the morning I started writing this reflection to the unexpected news that my cousin

Bobby had died of an aneurysm and that his wake and funeral would be held in a few hours. Unlike my grandfather, who lived a good, long life, Bobby was cut off in the prime of his life. Still stunned, I jumped in my car, drove to the church, and paid my final respects.

Later that day, with Bobby still on my mind, I settled down to read the Scriptures for this reflection and received a wonderful gift. Matthew 14:13-21 is a tremendous example of Jesus using his personal pain to have compassion on others in the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus gets the news that his cousin John the Baptist has died of what I would call a man-made aneurysm. I imagine that many things were going on in Jesus' mind after getting this awful news. Should he stay and risk being killed himself, or should he run for his life? Should he keep a low profile and just drop out of sight, or should he lose himself in the crowd? Jesus chooses to do none of these things. He sees hurting people and heals them. He sees hungry people and feeds them. Other readings for this day, especially Isaiah 55 and Psalm 145, echo the bountiful, gracious way in which God feeds people.

In our lives as hunger activists, we are confronted with personal problems and situations that come into our lives. The events of 9-112001 brought this home to me. Thousands were suddenly cut off that day in the prime of their lives, including Odessa Lamb Morris, a childhood friend of mine killed at the Pentagon. We were shocked and hurt and still feel the personal pain of that day, but we know that there are hurting people who need healing and hungry people who need food. In verse 16 of the Gospel passage, Jesus says to us, "You give them something to eat." We have been called to work through our own pain to heal the hurt and hunger of others. With God as our helper, we will feed millions.

Children's Time [LH]

The story of the feeding of the five thousand calls for some creative action. Try arranging in advance with a couple of adults or older children to join the children during your time with them and to bring with them, concealed, some food to share. Take time to organize the children into groups, and after introducing the story, pull out what is an obviously inadequate amount of food—perhaps a cracker or two. As you mull this over, have the pre-enlisted other people, one by one and with growing excitement, offer to share what they have, making it a joyous (though not meal-destroying) feast. Remind the children that the miracle of this feeding story is that people took only what they needed to eat and that the situation encouraged all to share what they had because they had created community.

Musical Suggestions

I Saw the People Gathered—BP 151

Precious Memories—AAH 516, 517

Only What You Do for Christ Will Last—AAH 548