

The Rev. Fanny Belanger
Sunday, June 26
Proper 8
Psalm 16
Galatians 5:1,13-25
Luke 9:51-62

*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*

Sculptor Tim Schmalz may have had in mind this verse we've just heard while he was working on his "Homeless Jesus", this sculpture you can see on your bulletin.

Yet the picture does not do justice to the actual work of Art, because more than seeing it, you have to experience it.

Experience it in a way that is quite disturbing because actually what you see first is not Jesus, but a homeless guy.

You have to pay real attention to realize that sleeping on this bench

wrapped in this cloak, this is Jesus indeed.

You have to be brave enough to come closer,

maybe you have to go down on your knees,

so you can see the Savior's face

or maybe you have to bend on his feet

and you can see the two holy wounds of the nails.

This surprising sculpture has been traveling around the country

and it has been welcomed in a very contrasted way.

A friend of mine told me how his grandmother, a committed Episcopalian,

dialed 911 when from her window overlooking her church

she spotted at sunset this suspicious character.

I can't imagine how you must feel when, as a devout Christian, you realize you have called the cops on your own Savior.

Mustn't feel too good.

As it did not feel very good for me last week

when walking down G Street, lost in my thoughts,

I saw the bundle from afar and, remembering I had no change, embarrassed,

I started looking down.

Yes, this sculpture is a striking reminder on what Jesus's life and message were really about.

Poverty.

Not the romantic poverty of the itinerant preacher who picked figs along his way

Hung out on the shore teaching about the kingdom of God

Sat on the border of a well, and asked a young woman to give him a drink.

No, Schmalz's sculpture talks to us about real poverty.

The poverty that makes us feel uncomfortable, the poverty that does not feel good

The poverty that does not smells good

The poverty that leaves people sleepless and hungry

Jesus was sleepless too.

Not only because he spent his nights praying but also because

he had nowhere to go.

And although he does not complain much, we know that sometimes

He just could not eat

Too many people, too little time, being on the road.

Or like in our Gospel today: people not welcoming him

People who had no time or no change for him.

People like us, maybe.

Yes, here we get a disturbing wake-up call, we who live in a society where having more seem to be the natural goal set to our lives.

We study a lot to work a lot to make a lot to spend a lot to get a lot.

But today, we are reminded that the one we call our Savior had nothing
And moreover, he asks us to follow him.

So what does it mean for us concretely?

Well I guess, Jesus does not ask us to be as miserable as the guys on the streets.

Jesus never advocates for misery.

Jesus always advocates for the miserable.

Jesus leads us to look at the poor and to look at ourselves, in return.

Because maybe the misery of some is born from the lack of poverty of others.

In this world, the wealthy are too wealthy and so the poor are too poor.

And even if it does not always feel like we are

we are the wealthy ones.

And so Jesus calls us to poverty – not misery.

A poverty that gives room and bread and life for all the poor Jesus identifies with.

As wealthy Christians we often find a compromise thinking God asks of us only

spiritual poverty

It has become so unnatural to us to deprive ourselves of things we can buy and possess legitimately or at least legally

After all we did not steal that money.

Yet at some point, at our level, according to our needs and those of our families,

we are called to detachment and simplicity.

Jesus does not call us to poverty to frustrate us

to punish us or even because it would somewhat “teach us”.

(Jesus does not send fire from heaven, only the “Sons of thunder” James and John as he called them could think about it)

Jesus calls us to material poverty to open our eyes on a suffering world and

open our hearts to our neighbors in need.

It's about setting us free.

For freedom Christ has set us free, says Paul today.

Buying stuff, doing stuff, taking care of stuff,

how is it our material possessions, our worldly distractions keep us enslaved

and enslave the workers, the trees and the rivers that pay the price for us?

Jesus wants to set us free.

It's about

being able to enjoy what we've already been given and bear the fruit of the Spirit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness.

Self-control indeed.

Called to poverty, we aren't called to a dull life.

Jesus had a passionate life.

He was always going from one place to another teaching, preaching, healing,

welcoming children and strangers, beggars and teachers.

Jesus was so busy he often did not have time to eat or to sleep

and yet he was never apart from God.

So I guess the question for us isn't even: are we too busy?

The question is: where is our attention focused,

what comes first in our lives?

Well, in the midst of our crazy lives, Jesus invites us to “Let the dead bury their own dead”.
Maybe it's hard for us to hear these words.

The thing is, Jesus probably refers to a Jewish tradition where
the dead were buried as soon as they died,

- not later than the following day -

But one year after, the families unburied the corpse now decomposed to collect the bones
and put them in an ossuary.

So what happens today is that Jesus is
not asking a man to forsake his father on his death bed,
but Jesus is referring to a religious rite.

And what Jesus is teaching is that true religion
is about following him

being in relationships with God and others
being alive in the best way we can live.

As parents give life to their children so they might live,
God gives us life so we might have life
not so we might perform religious rites.

Parents don't give life to their children so that they might organize their burial!
They want them to move forward

they kiss them goodbye, the children leave the house and hit the road.

The best way to honor our parents is not by saving their legacy but it's
in the way we live and love

and so we honor God not by keeping a tradition but
in the way we live and love.

Jesus today has his eyes set on Jerusalem.

He knows where God is calling him.

Jesus is poor enough, detached enough to experience that
the purpose of his life is not

buying, collecting, expanding
even for the sake of the kingdom.

His life is about giving, offering, welcoming
– even on the wood of the cross.

And as Jesus gave God the first place, Jesus asks us to give him the first place too.

Yes it is hard for us to hear these words,
because we are not poor enough, all so busy with many things.

Well, Jesus was busy too.

Yet he was single-minded, he lived for the one thing: The love of God.

And so God mustn't be put on top of all the things we have to do
God must be in everything we do

- would it be changing diapers or filling tax forms or selling shoes.

God must be at the heart of this life we are living.

This is our true worship

Our worship in church just models this worship of the heart Jesus is calling us to
everyday

in everything.

Even if all we do usually don't really give glory to God

if we offer it to him

it will eventually, if we

Live by the Spirit, not by the flesh.

During the Eucharist, we do a sign of the cross on the bread and the wine
and then we cross ourselves.

It means: we are the place of worship
we give ourselves up to God with the offerings.

The altar is our own life.

Christ has nowhere to rest
except
in our own hearts.

*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*

This week the Washington Post did a headline
on the Restoration of the Holy Rock in Jerusalem.

Maybe you have heard that they are going to open Jesus's tomb to repair the chapel that was built on it.

How interesting in this context to hear Jesus saying

I had not a place to lay my head

some versions of the text read: Jesus does not have *a stone* to lay his head on.

What a spiritual meaning it takes if we refers this saying

to the grave.

the stone where Jesus will ultimately rest his head.

Having his eyes set on Jerusalem, on the cross and on his death, Jesus tells us:

He ultimately will have nowhere to lie down.

Not only because of his poverty (his tomb was not even his own)

But maybe also because of this freedom he has set us free for.

Having nowhere to rest isn't a sacrifice, it's a promise.

Jesus will not lie in the grave

This a foretelling of the resurrection.

You will not abandon me to the grave, nor let you holy one see the Pit

as we said in our psalm today.

God is nowhere to be found

but God is everywhere to be lived.

Not in a life of self-seeking, collecting, protecting, defending

we find God in a life of giving, opening, looking

God has no home, not even a church.

But church is here to teach us how to see God inside of us

how to perceive God in the world

in the heart of a mother

in the face of a homeless man.

God calls us to move forward because he has so much to give us

in this life as we know it, but also

in the life as we don't know it yet

but as we will know, eventually.

So indeed, *let the dead bury their own dead*

We all are the living ones. Amen.