



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
9-20-15

The late Henri Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest who wrote many books on spirituality and prayer. In one of his books there is a lecture that he delivered at Harvard, where he'd taught, in 1987. It is called Adam's Story and I wish to share a bit of it with you this morning. I quote Nouwen.

“During the past two years I moved from Harvard to Daybreak, that is from an institution for the best and the brightest to a community for mentally handicapped people. Daybreak, close to Toronto, is part of an international federation of communities called l'Arche – the Ark – where mentally handicapped men and women and their assistants try to live together in the spirit of the Beatitudes.I live in a house with six handicapped people and four assistants. Adam is the weakest person of our family. He cannot speak, cannot dress or undress himself, cannot walk alone or eat without much help. He does not cry, or laugh and only occasionally makes eye contact. His back is distorted and his arm and leg movements are very twisted.....Sometimes he grows suddenly rigid, he utters a howling groan, and on a few occasions I have seen a big tear coming down his cheek. This deeply handicapped young man, who by many outsiders is considered an embarrassment, a distortion of humanity, a useless creature who should not have been allowed to be born, started to become my dearest companion. Out of this broken body and broken mind emerged a most beautiful human being offering me a greater gift than I would ever be able to offer him. Adam's parents came for a visit. I asked them, “Tell me, during all the years you had Adam in your home, what did he give you?” His father smiled and said without a moment of hesitation, “He brought us peace....he is our peacemaker....our son of peace.” Let me then tell you about Adam's peace. Adam's peace is first of all a peace rooted in being. I realize the best thing I can do for Adam is to be with him. Adam's peace is not only a peace rooted in being, but also a peace rooted in the heart. Adam keeps telling me over and over again that what makes us human is not our minds, but our hearts, not our ability to think, but our ability to love. By heart I mean the center of our being where God has hidden the divine gifts of trust, hope and love. The heart allows us to enter into relationships and become sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of each other. Long before our mind is able to exercise its power, our heart is already able to develop a trusting human relationship. The mystery of Adam is that in his deep mental and emotional brokenness he has become so empty of all human pride that he has become the mediator of that first love. The third and most tangible quality of Adam's peace is that while rooted more in being than in doing and more in the heart than in the mind, it is a peace that always calls forth community. Adam, in his total vulnerability calls us together as a family. Because of Adam there is always someone home, because of Adam there is a quiet

rhythm in the house, because of Adam there are moments of silence and quiet, because of Adam there are always words of affection, gentleness, and tenderness, because of Adam there is patience and endurance, because of Adam there are smiles and tears visible to all, because of Adam there is always space for mutual forgiveness and healing...yes, because of Adam there is peace among us. Thus, you see, Adam is gradually teaching me something about the peace that is not of this world. It is a peace not constructed by tough competition, hard thinking, and individual stardom, but rooted in simply being present to each other, a peace that speaks about the first love of God by which we are all held and a peace that keeps calling us to community, a fellowship of the weak.”

Jesus wasn't messing around when he took a little child into his arms and told his disciples about true greatness. True greatness serves, true greatness is welcoming, true greatness takes care of children and the weakest amongst us. True greatness doesn't add up ones net worth and calculate value, doesn't evaluate what might get us noticed or rewarded or honored in this world.

Donald Trump has been in the news a lot lately. I've yet to see him embrace a child or talk about caring for the weak ones in our midst. Instead I've heard him brag about his wealth, about his business acumen, his leadership ability in being direct and making decisions on his own. If I were to look at the qualities discussed in the James reading this morning – Trump's exemplifies the wisdom of the world – boastful, striving, coveting and trying to attain it, engaging in disputes. I mention Trump because he calls forth attention to himself, yet he is but one witness to the wisdom of the world.

Jesus comes amongst us, James comes amongst us, Adam comes amongst us to upset the apple cart – to turn us upside down and inside out. They totally challenge our notion of greatness. James, and Jesus let us know that greatness is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

For those who make peace. I know that in a little while we will leave here and return to a world that asks us to strive for greatness through our ability to perform using our minds, our bodies, our worldly wisdom, our strength, our busyness. That striving surrounds us, flows through our culture, is a loud and demanding voice inside of us and around us.

But for a few moments, in this place and time – let us rest and reflect where true peace is to be found, where true greatness is real, where we can just be and love in community, with hope, trust, and love as our foundation. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you.

Thanks be to God.