

From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...
Sunday, May 3, 2015

Preacher: Rev. Susan Boone

Scriptures: John 15: 1-8

Sermon: Sharing the Feast

I'm sure you know that in the common course of events, the expectation of a Sunday is to take one of the scriptures (preferably the lectionary), pull it apart, analyze it and in the end create a sermon from it (preferably something profound!) Well, the vines and branches didn't quite inspire me this morning, maybe it was the part about being thrown into the fire. But what did is an exploration about what it means to break bread together, what it means to share these common things with one with another and what makes them holy. Up here on the table there is the traditional bread and cup, we say some traditional words, and serve and receive them in a traditional way. And in it we tell the story of Jesus in the upper room with his friends.

It's important that we take great care that we do not confine sacramental life to the church to these four walls, for if we do, we risk becoming merely Sunday morning Christians. Anything that we do, when it is done with love, is sacramental. It is the only way to truly live out our Christian story, and we need to broaden the meaning of sharing, of communion, broaden the meaning of what Jesus meant when he shared a meal with his friends.

On one of the pieces on our woodland in Whately there is a holy place. It's maybe a half mile hike off the road, in a clearing, in a pine grove, by a stream. There is fire circle there, where, over the years, many of us have sat and shared and worshiped. For over 20 years our friend Charlie has been using this place as a base camp to teach a high school class in survival living.

His students spend a whole semester in the classroom and in the field learning how to live and survive on their own in the wilderness. They also learn valuable life lessons in and amongst practical information of map reading shelter building and safety. Their final exam so to speak is a 2 night solo which takes place in the early spring. They were up there a couple of weeks ago, which is probably where my inspiration came from. During this time the students go out alone out of contact with one another and the base camp with nothing but their survival kits. They build themselves a shelter and stay for 3 days. During that time they learn a lot, not just about survival and how it feels to live close to the earth but about themselves.

At the end of the 3rd day they return to base camp. When they return Charlie has them

sit around the fire circle where they share their stories. These dozen or so teenagers have not eaten for 3 days except for what was in their survival kits and what they might have scavenged from the plants in the woods. But the first thing Charlie does is to pass around a box of vanilla wafers instructing each person to take 2 and then hand the box around. They cannot eat anything until everyone has been served and then they are asked to feed their cookies to their neighbors on each side.

It's very spirit filled, he says, especially considering how hungry the kids are and what they have been through. It's spirit filled because their first act, not their last is to feed another. Three sacred acts: telling our stories, serving one another and sharing what we have not just when we are hungry but because we are hungry.

Robert Fulgrum tells of being a guest at his son's kindergarten class, where each day at snack time all the chores are divided up among the children, taking turns bringing the cookies, arranging the chairs, setting the table getting the cartons of milk, arranging the cookies neatly on a plate. One child is responsible for placing something in the middle of table to talk about during the snack. For half the class, their job for the day is being good hosts and the other half being good guests, saying, "Yes, please. I would like some milk" and "Thank you very much" and "How nice the table looks." When all were served everyone was expected to sit quietly for a moment hands folded in their laps until the teacher said, "Lets share." Each child takes a cookie off his plate breaks it in half and gives it to a guest before eating the other half himself. During the snack time they discuss the object in the center of the table. And then they share the clean up chores. Fulgrum observes: "Cookies and milk with those children became a sacrament for me. Grace was clearly present. It was a ritual reminder that civilization depends on sharing resources in a just and humane fashion. This is not kid stuff"

When Jesus the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth met for the first time with his friends and followers they had supper together and did what Jews have always done: they blessed the meal. And it was at least a deeply human experience, regardless of any theological interpretation one might place on the occasion and the gestures made there. There was unleavened bread and wine. One, the bread made and eaten daily; the other, the wine a product of time. He must have said in effect, "I will not be around much longer. When I am gone and you come together, don't forget me." Any of us who share food together under any circumstances are free to invest that sharing with the sacramental spirit of communion, and often do.

I sometimes wonder if any of the children in Fulgrum's kindergarten class eventually found themselves around a fire circle in my Whately woods reenacting the blessing of sharing of being good hosts and of being good guests.

Today this morning we are invited to the fire circle to share our stories of survival in the wilderness; we are invited to sit in the tiny chairs at the little tables and share cookies and milk with the children; and we are invited to share the feast with the Jewish carpenter who said, “This is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.”