

Yr. B, All Saints
November 1, 2009
Preached by Furman Buchanan
St. Martins in the Fields
1471 words

Lessons:
Isaiah 25 :6-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

I speak to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *still* comes to us in our grief and weeps with us and brings us new life. Amen.

I want to tell you a story about a young woman who reminds me of both Mary and her sister Martha in this passage from the Gospel according to St. John. Like Martha, this young woman knew her way around the kitchen—and was not afraid of hard work. Like Martha, she wanted things to be just right when special guests were coming over for a visit—like having a piping hot, freshly baked peach pie on the kitchen counter—a sign of sweet hospitality if there ever was one!

And like Mary, I know there was at least one dark night—and probably many dark nights—in the midst of the Great Depression when this 27 year old mother of three young boys said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my husband would not have died.” The woman I am speaking about is Carrie Lee Buchanan, my paternal grandmother.

This Gospel story offers us a powerful insight into the raw honesty, grief and disappointment of two of Jesus’ beloved friends, Mary and Martha.

Mary and Martha needed Jesus to show up sooner...and with a healing miracle to save their brother, Lazarus. Their story is also *our* story. *We* need Jesus to show up with a healing miracle for us and those we love. And sometimes we are disappointed. Sometimes we are left with only bitter grief when there is no miracle that comes in time, and when the people we love die. This is what happened in the case of my grandfather, Carrie Lee’s husband.

He died too soon. He left a wife and three young boys. And during the Great Depression, life insurance was a luxury many people could not afford and Social Security did not yet exist.

Carrie Lee was left with not much more than the sting of her husband’s death, compounded with the grief of wondering how she could manage to hold on to those three precious children—Bob, Bill and Furman. She could cook their meals. She could sew their clothes. But how would she ever pay for a roof over their heads or the basic ingredients for food and clothing.

Some of her family members urged Carrie Lee to send her boys to an orphanage. After all, the economy was in shambles. There was *no way* she could possibly eke out a living with a 5 year old, a 3 year old, and a one year old baby—and with no husband to support any of them.

The Salvation Army could only offer so much to a family like this. It was *literally* an impossible problem...until Carrie Lee’s sister, her husband and their young children invited Carrie Lee and these three boys into *their* home—not just until the shock of death wore off, not just until she could find a suitable orphanage. But for *good!*

They were all adopted into that home and family *for life!* How about that for a true miracle of resurrection and new life?

I had a special privilege a little more than a year ago to spend part of a day with my Uncle Bob, and to listen to some of his memories from childhood. He talked about doing chores to help keep the new, large, unwieldy

household functioning. He laughed about jumping the fence of his backyard and running to the school (which was next door) when the bell would start ringing in the morning.

And then with the most serious conviction, he looked me straight in the eyes and proclaimed that as far as he was concerned, his Uncle Linwood was the greatest man—except for Jesus Christ—that ever walked the face of the earth.

The reason Bob could say that—and mean it with every fiber of his being—is because for him Uncle Linwood *was* the personification of Jesus. His uncle was the one who showed up with a miracle when all hope was gone, His uncle was the one who showed up with a *real life resurrection* from the certain death of being shuttled off to an orphanage and losing *not just* his dad, but his *whole family*. His uncle was the one who showed up with the promise of a new life, And not just *any* new life, but one lived *together* as a family.

This is precisely the kind of people who *we* are called to be as people of faith—*we* are all called to personify Jesus in a world that is broken and filled with despair. As the Church, we are called to *be* the Body of Christ in the world today.

Sometimes that means opening our homes to those with real needs that are not convenient for us to fulfill. Sometimes that means opening our hearts to those with impossible problems that are not easy for us to solve. Other times, personifying Jesus just means showing up to offer healing where there is grief or to convey a blessing where there is despair.

Our Lord Jesus Christ *still* comes to us in our grief and weeps with us—he comes to us through the grace and love of real human hands and real human hearts.

Our Lord Jesus Christ *still* brings us new life—not *just* when we die, but here and now through the miracles of new life that we *give and receive* in his name.

And just like the resurrection miracle of new life that Carrie Lee and her sons experienced through *their* miraculous adoption, our Lord Jesus Christ *still* graciously adopts us into his home, not for a season, but for *good*—in *this* life as well as in the life to come.

Today we will have the great privilege to welcome a new member into the household of God through the waters of Baptism. Mollie Elliott has come to this parish, and she wants to put her whole trust in the grace and love of Jesus Christ. She wants to be adopted into the household of God.

The baptism of an adult is one of the most hopeful things we can ever be blessed to witness. You all know that the Christian Church is declining in numbers. And I trust you also know that you and I cannot give birth to anywhere near enough babies to change that trend.

Some folks are worried about the future of the Church, and think that somebody ought to do something about it. The answer for the Church—and for this congregation in particular—is simple.

We need to reach forth our hands in love.¹ We need to adopt those who could use a little more grace & love in their lives—and that includes *everybody*, doesn't it?

We don't have to reach out in fear because our congregation—like most—is aging. We just need to reach out in love, the way Christ has shown us.

¹ This phrase is found in one of the prayers for mission included in Morning Prayer, *Book of Common Prayer*.

You see, Jesus did not show us how to be reasonable. Reasonable people send impossible problems to orphanages. Jesus showed us how to be radical, resurrection people. And resurrection people say, “You’re welcome in our house, not for a season, but for good!”

Resurrection people say, “We will make sacrifices for you to be included here.” Resurrection people say, “We will make changes for you to feel at home here.” Resurrection people say, “We will do whatever it takes for the sake of Christ’s love because it is only by Christ’s love that we found *our* home here.”

A Church that practices adoption is—by definition—a growing Household. It is not always easy, but it is always loving, it is always faithful and it is always life-giving.

St. John the Divine said it best when he described his dream of what the Church should look like in this morning’s New Testament Lesson: “See! The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.”²

This is the promise that all saints of God have received by adoption. This is the promise *we* have received by adoption. This is the promise we are called to invite *others* to receive by adoption.

It is the promise of a new life, bound together with Christ and one another in the household of God. It’s a big house. It’s often unwieldy and chaotic, and there are always lots of chores to be done. Sacrifice and change are just part of life, and fussin’ and fighting are inevitable.

But it is first and foremost a house filled with love and a commitment...that all are welcome...all are welcome no matter what...and not just for a season, but for good!

Amen.

² Revelation 21:3