

July 14, 2024

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 10

Meditation “What do you celebrate?”

The Pope died and went to heaven. He was greeted at the Pearly Gates by St. Peter. St. Peter offered the Pope an extensive tour of heaven, and the Pope gratefully accepted the offer. As they were walking down one gold paved street, the Pope stopped and looked up at an extremely elaborate building that was bigger than any building he had ever seen. “What is that building?” asked the Pope.

“Oh,” St. Peter replied, “that’s just the library.”

“The library.” Said the Pope.

“Yes,” replied St. Peter, “It contains all knowledge. You could spend an eternity in there reading and studying.”

“I always wanted to study the Bible from the original texts. Are they contained therein?” asked the Pope.

“Of course they are. I said the library contains ALL knowledge,” replied St. Peter.

“The problem is, I was never very good at Greek, and even worse at Hebrew. Latin is my language. Could I find help to learn Greek and Hebrew in the library?” asked the Pope.

“Of course you can. You can find anything you can think of in this library,” replied St. Peter.

So, the Pope spent 1,000 years improving his Greek, and then another 1,000 years improving his Hebrew, before setting to work on reading the original texts of the Bible.

One day as St. Peter was passing the library he heard a blood-curdling scream come from within. He rushed in and found the Pope on the floor, in a corner, in the fetal position, rocking back and forth.

“What is the problem? How can I help?” asked St. Peter.

“An ‘r’, an ‘r’, they forgot an ‘r’” said the Pope.

“I don’t understand,” said St. Peter, “what do you mean?”

“An ‘r’, an ‘r’, they forgot an ‘r’” said the Pope, “it was supposed to be ‘celebrate’.”

It seems to be a summer of celebrations. Last weekend and this weekend there was a celebration of music. Last weekend it was Sunfest at Victoria Park. This weekend at Harris Park was Rock The Park. Last night there was lots of celebrating in Uruguay as they beat Canada 4-3 on penalty kicks to win third overall at Copa America. And tonight there will be a celebration for either Argentina or Colombia as they play the final game of the tournament. And at the end of the month there will be more celebrating; celebrating of sports at both the Ontario Summer Games, that run August 1-4 in London, and at the Summer Olympics in Paris, that run July 26 to August 11. To top it all off, the last three Thursdays there has been a celebration of community at Holy Diner, and there are seven more Thursdays to go. Music, sports, community. So much to celebrate.

In his day and in his own way, David celebrated too. David celebrated as the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem. And he put body and soul into that celebration. He leapt and danced with wild abandon. In fact, David, clad in an ephod, a linen apron worn by the high priest, may have revealed much about himself that day as he leapt and danced, if you know what I mean. Just picture leaping and dancing down Dorchester Road clad only in a hospital gown and you'll get the idea. I do hope David was wearing more than just an ephod, although the Bible is not clear on that. Either way, Michal, his wife, thought it was disgraceful and unseemly the way David carried on in public, in the sight of all the people of Jerusalem, and she had no bones about letting David know it when he came home.

While we didn't read the gospel story today, it too includes a celebration. Herod threw a party for himself, to celebrate his birthday. There were courtiers and officers and the leaders of Galilee. There was feasting and drinking and entertainment, even the dancing of Herodias' daughter, Salome. And then Herod did something that could be described as foolish, he offered his step-daughter anything she asked for, even to half of his kingdom. And she asked for the head of John the Baptist, on a platter. And then Herod did something even more foolish and terrible; he did not object, but gave her that for which she asked.

Just think of all the less than brilliant things we do when we get carried away with ourselves. We make stupid oaths, break traffic laws, abuse our position by flashing our credentials to get out of trouble. There are lots of reasons to put a cap on behavior, but being too rigid can also kill spontaneity, celebrations, and even ecstatic worship. Think of Herod's wife who not only had John the Baptist killed, but killed the celebration as well, or Michal whose sharp tongue reprimanded David, high priest, king, husband.

The important thing is not about the stupid things we may do. And neither is it about those who would put limits on ecstatic worship. The important thing is, What do we celebrate? Many came to London this weekend and last to celebrate music; global music, and rock music. The people of Uruguay celebrated their victory over Canada, something that looked unlikely until the final minutes of the game. Others will be celebrating a soccer win tonight, or a medal at the Ontario Summer Games, or a medal at the Paris Olympics. Many have come to celebrate community around a table and over a hot dog or a hamburger at Holy Diner, or will do so before the summer is over. Herod celebrated the day of his birth. David celebrated the presence of God,

symbolized in the ark of the covenant, and its arrival in the city of Jerusalem.

Why we ourselves are here today to celebrate. To celebrate God's gifts: the gift of life, the gift of God's grace, the gift of God's presence with each of us, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, for as long as we shall live, and then some. So let us celebrate God's presence in our life and be a people holy in God's sight. Amen.