

Homily: "Embracing our Brokenness, Embracing our Wholeness" [Annual Conference Memorial, Pueblo CO]

Scripture: Micah 4: 1-5

Date: June 19, 2014

Theme: We live with our shadows. We live with our blessings. It is through the mystery of Christ that we are restored into abundant life-giving relationships with God, with Other, and with Self.

Let us pray: Eternal God, we praise you for the great company of all those who have finished their course in faith and now rest from their labor. We praise you for those dear to us whom we name in our hearts before you. To all of these, grant your peace. Let perpetual light shine upon us. And help us to live so that when our days here are accomplished, we die as those who go forth to live, so that in our living or in our dying, our life may be in you and that nothing in life nor death will be able to separate us from your great love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We gather this evening to honor the Cloud of Witnesses who are before us. Many of the names we know well. We know the wonderful ways in which they served the United Methodist Church, in which they served the Rocky Mountain Conference. But more importantly, the multiple ways in which they served God and God's children. We know the churches they served. We know the ways in which they provided leadership during the days of their ministry.

And as well, there are some whom we do not know. We have their names before us. But we do not know of their laughter. We do not know of their deep desires. We do not know the many ways in which they lived out their faith. In truth, we do not need to know. For tonight is not about our recounting all of their achievements. Tonight, this memorial service, this communion service is about embracing their place in the Body of Christ. Tonight's service is about embracing our place in this mystery which is at the core of our faith.

Even for the ones whom we know well, there is still much that we do not know, even if we know them as husband or wife, even if we know them as father or mother, even if we know them as close colleagues and friends.

We cannot know the many ways in which they touched the lives of others. Perhaps, in ways that even they themselves did not know. We cannot know all the ways by their example of goodness, by their commitment that they touched the lives of someone else, someone who was on the periphery. Someone who in the moment did not say anything, may never have said anything and yet their lives were affected for the good. Each day, we do not know the impact we have for better or for worse. Our task is to live the best we can, as was the task of these Cloud of Witnesses.

Likewise, we cannot know all of their struggles. Those moments of doubt, those moments of struggling for survival. Those moments when they wrestled with their shadows.

There is another group this evening whom we are embracing. Individuals whom we do not know their names. Individuals who live 150 years ago. Much of them we cannot know. But this we do know, that when their children came running up to them laughing that they also laughed. This we do know

that they had hopes and dreams of living a full life and that when their time came to die, that it would be a peaceful death. This we do know that they would have desired for their children and their grandchildren to grow into the abundance of the Great Spirit. We do know this, that they lived with the acute awareness of the beauty and power of creation around them, of Grandmother Earth, of the blessings of the Four Winds, of Grandfather Sky. Likewise, we cannot know the sheer panic and violence in which they were killed, in which their bodies were torn apart, of children being ripped out of the arms of their mothers.

This evening, as we embrace those who have preceded us in life and in death, in our knowing and our unknowing, we acknowledge that we do not honor by portraying perfection. Perfection resides only with God – the Source of Life and Beauty. Rather we honor by embracing the brokenness and the wholeness of the legacy that we have received. We honor by embracing our own brokenness and our own wholeness which we live out and hand to the next generation.

There are some things of the past that cannot be reconciled, that cannot be healed - if by that we mean that they go away. But what we can do is embrace the past, both that of pain as well as blessing. To embrace it, is to own it, to state that for better or worse it is a part of whom we are.

A few days ago, I was talking with Dr. Edward Antonio, who grew up in Zimbabwe, surviving off of the streets, who as a child was brought into the fold of a church sponsored orphanage. He was telling me that in the beauty of that country as the sun gets to a certain point one has two shadows – a shadow of the back and a shadow of the front. A shadow of where one has been and a shadow of where one is going.

This evening we are called to embrace our shadows, even as we honor those who have faithfully lived before us. We do well to know that 1850 through 1920, there was not a decision made in the Denver/Colorado region that was not made by Methodists. From Governor Evans, to Chivington, to John Wesley Iliff, to Buechtel, to Elizabeth Iliff Warren, to Bishop Henry White Warren. The City of Denver exists because the leadership of Methodists were committed to its well being. Much good came from their decisions. The area turned from a lawless gathering of gold seekers to a city with a library, a newspaper, with elementary schools, with the founding of the University of Denver, with the strong stand against slavery, fighting against the huge abuse of alcohol. This is much of which we can claim pride. But as far as the issue of Indians, the Methodist Episcopal Church stood on the wrong side. Six months after the Sand Creek Massacre, at the regional Annual Conference of Nebraska and Kansas which would have included the territory of Colorado, the presiding bishop during his opening address stated in very clear terms: "We should not allow savages to stand in the way of settling this land by good Christians."

We typically have such judgment about our shadows. We would desire that they go away completely. We look at the shadows of the past and see them as failure, as sources of guilt and shame. As such then either we deny them or project them onto others or we become weighed down by them. Out of our negative sense of brokenness, we resolve not to have those shadows into our future. Yet, invariably our future contains the very shadows we have tried to deny.

Our faith offers us a different way. There is a peace if we can embrace the fact that the shadows are not to be feared - that as surely as there have been shadows in our past, there will be shadows into our future. Indeed, it is our faith that invites us to embrace our shadows, as surely as we seek to live with our blessings. This is not to be paralyzed with guilt and shame, rather through the mystery of Christ, who

makes us whole even with our brokenness that then we are restored into abundant life-giving relationships with God, with Other, and with Self.

It is then that in the words of Micah, we shall all sit under own vines and under our fig trees and no one shall make one another afraid any more, for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.

Let this be that sacred moment when we are restored into abundant living by honoring our ancestors both known and unknown, by embracing our legacies [both our shadows and our glories], may this be so through the mystery of reconciliation of Jesus Christ. Amen.