



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

July 26, 2009

## Pentecost 9

When I was in Arkansas at all saints in Russellville, my good friend and choirmaster was a man called Louis Welcher. Louis was a professional opera singer and had spent a couple of years in Germany, but he missed his family so much he came home. Louis had 2 children. The youngest one was called David and his birthday was December 25<sup>th</sup> Christmas day. They always had a birthday party on July 25<sup>th</sup> so his birthday did not get overshadowed by Christmas. When I left Arkansas in 1995 David was about 10 years old. I went back to Arkansas a couple of months later to close on the house. I visited Louis and he told me that on the first few Sundays I was gone from all saints they had a supply priest. He said after the services when he and David were riding home David was quite indignant because the supply priest was not doing communion right. He did not do it like father Alan so it wasn't right.

Louis and I laughed at young David's observations but young David's observations were a profound insight into the way we live our lives.

What happens with many of us is that the things of our lives, the stuff of our lives becomes a routine and it becomes so ingrained in our being that the way something has been done all these years is the only way it should be done. By us, and often unfortunately, by others.

I tell wedding couples in premarital counseling when we talk about conflict that it will be the little things that the other does that will annoy. One squeezes the toothpaste with the fist and here it comes. The other carefully folds the tube from the bottom

On the bigger issues one spends freely while the other makes very careful decisions before any money counts ever leaves the bank account.

All of us have been challenged by others on the way we do things simply because we have always done them that way. Of course there are 3 choices when challenged.

1 We listen. We see another way of doing something, are convinced that it is a better way and move into doing it that way.

Secondly after an honest discussion we see that the way it has been done is still a good way. It might need some fine tuning and after some improvements it carries on.

The third way is that we dig in our heels and just because we have always done it this way then by golly there is no way we are going to give an inch in changing it.

We are challenged by a new way of doing something and because we do not want to change, because it does not suit us, we balk at it and usually kick up a fuss or just leave.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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This happens in our schools, in our places of work and even in communities of faith.

It happens because as individuals we have become so complacent and so righteous that what we do is the only way to do it simply because I like it. What has happened is that it has become a self serving function instead of a self giving spirit.

Jesus spoke on this in the gospels. He called it hardness of heart.

Mark 3:5 before Jesus cures the man with the withered hand on a Sabbath the authorities were watching to see if Jesus would heal or not because it was against the law to do any kind of work on the Sabbath. Jesus asked, is it lawful to do good or harm on the Sabbath, to save life or kill. The answer was silence and Jesus grieved at their hardness of heart. He healed the man

The hardness of heart was that the law was not serving any more. It had become oppressive even to the point that you could not do any good deed on a particular day. The law had hardened people's hearts to the extent that it had become more important than people.

Mark 16:14, the longer ending of Mark, in his resurrection appearance to his disciples there are no nice words, no breathing on them, and no affirmation of them. What Jesus does is upbraid them for their lack of faith and hardness of heart. Mary had told them he was raised but they did not believe it. They did not believe the good news and had retreated from the world and were not doing what they were supposed to be doing. Their hearts had been hardened to sticking to the old ways of fear instead of trust, of silence instead of proclamation, of acceptance rather than challenge. Of doing nothing rather than doing the right thing.

Today we are told that the disciples hearts were hardened because they did not understand the feeding of the 5000.

Jesus challenged them to give the people something to eat and they gave him a blank stare. Their hearts were hardened because they would have rather sent the people away and not be bothered with them instead of looking for ways to help.

The challenge of Jesus to each of us is to take a real good look at our lives and our attitudes. What is it in our lives that we have hardened our hearts towards? What is it that has become so self serving that it is preventing us from being self giving? What is it that we have become so righteous about that we have lost the sense of goodness that we are asked to share with one another?

What is it that we have grown so comfortable with that we do not see the challenges that Jesus is presenting to us? For young David at the age of ten it was the way someone did communion. What is it with us that has hardened our heart? Amen

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