

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2009
The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Bang

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The first house we lived in here in Buffalo was located on West Utica Street, just a few houses in from Elwood Avenue. It was a grand old home, built in 1897. We knew that because when refinishing the floors early on in our tenure there, I pulled the shoe molding away from the dining room floor, we found, newspapers telling stories about how they were preparing for the upcoming Pan American Exposition.

The house had an interesting history. We bought it from Frank and his sister LouLou Tauriello. For many years, they operated Tauriello's Tea Room out of that house and the sign was still in the basement when we bought the house. When I came to Holy Trinity in October of 1983, Lou had not completely moved out of the house yet and our lawyer, being the fine Christian man that he was, was too kind and never told her to get a move on (the lawyer was Tom Barney by the way) and so for my first three months here, waiting for Lou to empty out the house, I lived at Trinity Tower, in a studio apartment on the 8th floor.

In that apartment, I had a pull out studio day bed, a TV tray table, a television, some plates I took from the kitchen here, one frying pan and a pot to boil pasta in, it was fairly Spartan. I loved the commute though, and every night when I got home, thanks to some of our members who lived here, I would find little treats left at my door stoop, bags of homemade cookies, a piece of homemade pie, a Tupperware container with pot roast or meatloaf, or some other delectable. I also got to know the residents that lived there at the time, great people, some of whom you may remember: Eleanor Richards, May Swanekamp, the Eichelbergers, Vera Knorr, Madelaine Knapp, Maybelle Kamerer. One person who sticks out was Amanda Becker. She was a tough cookie. One weekend when Debby came to visit, she decided to do some of my laundry. Now, until we bought our first house in Liverpool, we did all of our laundry in Laundromats or in the apartment complex's laundry room, and so we were no strangers to proper laundry etiquette. But apparently, we had miscalculated the length of the wash cycle at Trinity Tower, and so when Debby came downstairs, 30 seconds after the cycle had ended, there was Amanda Becker, ripping our clothes out of the washer. She also ripped Debby a new one when she arrived.

Anyway, over the three months, we got to know the folks there fairly well. It was a good introduction to Buffalo as all of the residents had great stories to tell about our new town.

Because I didn't have much of an apartment to come back to, I spent the first three months here, getting to know a lot of the folks in the parish, and many of you were quick to welcome me into your homes and lives.

Living in Trinity Tower as I did, I didn't have all the comforts of home there, which included a decent stereo. All I had with me was a small portable cassette deck and a set of earphones. But I do recall the number one album at the time, it was Michael Jackson's Thriller. I was a fan and listened to that album on many occasions. But as much as I was a fan of most of his music, I

have to confess, these past three weeks have left me saying to myself, “C’mon now, enough is enough.” The man was a talented musician and when he emerged on the scene with his brothers, they did break down many racial barriers that existed in the industry at the time, and I give him credit for much of the innovation he brought to music video and concert theatrics. And yes, he was a generous philanthropist, and did much good with his farm aid concerts and AIDS benefits, but when most of Europe was underwater and all of Austria’s rivers were at flood stage the same week he died, that never made the news. Congress held a moment of silence in the chamber for him, and yet, they don’t do it for each of the soldiers who die while on duty. So a little perspective is needed here, I mean, do we really need to see the clips of his hair on fire 30 or 40 times the course of one 24 hour day? For that matter, do we really need to know what we were told about the Octo-mom, or Anna Nicole Smith, or Paris Hilton or Madonna, or Jon and Kate, or any of the other thousand entertainers, sports figures and billionaires that are splashed across the tabloids, the television media and the internet?

I don’t think we do, but on the other hand, to a certain extent, we get what we ask for because if no one was watching that drivel, I suspect something else might be broadcast. But it would be a fairly safe wager if I bet that People Magazine sells more copy than the Smithsonian, and that the National Enquirer sells more copy than the Atlantic Monthly.

It isn’t the first time that the masses dictate the agenda of the media, fashion, music, and print.

To a certain extent, what we heard read from Mark’s gospel this morning illustrates the same point. Jesus did not see himself as a miracle worker, or a faith healer, and yet, we read over and over again, how the masses kept coming to him to be healed. Jesus had one agenda, the crowds, another. The gospel of Mark lifts up this tension for us throughout the whole book. On more than one occasion, the crowds, the religious elite, even his own disciples misread his mission. And on more than one occasion we read of Jesus attempting to flee the scene in order to reprioritize his mission and to set the disciples straight on why he came and what he hoped to accomplish. And on more than one occasion, especially in Mark, we read that it didn’t work.

Today’s text contains a classic example of that. Jesus’ reputation was spreading far and wide and it got to the point that he couldn’t get away from the crowds who would come, not to hear him preach, but to be healed, to be exorcized, to be cured.

But as much as he did heal all those who came to him, that was not his mission. His mission was to reveal the will of his Father, to get people to see beyond who they were, and their own life situation, and their own needs and wants, to what was the larger picture of life and creation and purpose. To get us, each of us, to grasp where we fit in the whole of it all, how we’re all connected, through God, to one another, to the rest of creation and to the Creator. He talked of love and of neighbor and of peace and of an eternity beyond our small imaginations.

But as is now, so was then, our world view, our sense of the whole, is diminished by our own needs and wants. The world of “I don’t feel well, cure me,” may indeed be urgent, it may even be important, but it is not eternal. To be cured for the moment, only to die eventually, brings this point to the fore. Jesus’ mission was to bring to light an understanding of that which is beyond our everyday needs and wants, to open a window to expose a world view that takes me beyond

the house I occupy day in and day out, to show me that there is, as St. Paul once said, “a better country,” not to live in but to strive for.

This is the message Jesus lived for and most importantly died for. Jesus did not die so that I might be cured of my illnesses, that I go through life allergy free, injury free, pain free, or tragedy free. Jesus did not live and die and God did not raise him from the dead, so that I might have a lucky charm or talisman to call on in his name to save me from whatever today might bring my way, but rather, that with whatever does come my way, I would be able to see beyond it, to endure it, to accept it, knowing that I have an advocate in the One who created me and that that same Creator will eventually draw me to Himself.

Jesus didn't want to be a miracle worker, so that everyone would point to him and say, “There, here, is the one who cured me.” Instead, he wanted to be the one who people pointed to and said, “There, here, is the one who pointed me to the Father.”

May that be said of each of us.

Amen.