

Homily to go with Dave Krick's reflections on July 20th, 2008

by the Rev. Joe Summers

For a number of different reasons I hoped Dave would talk about his experiences with running and spirituality and how they've helped him get through a terribly difficult time in his life, but one is that I think we need to keep talking about not being afraid.

In a wonderful New Yorker article entitled "Let God Love Gene Robinson" Gene Robinson talks about what he sees as the opposite of love. It isn't hatred. It isn't anger. It is fear. For him it is fear that is at the route of what disconnects us from ourselves, and others, and God.

The author writes about the real possibility that Gene will be killed at any time but also his witness in the face of these threats:

"It seems peculiar to describe the absence of fear as something palpable, but this small, bespectacled, unremarkable-looking man has about him an absence of fear so entire that it is palpable. Or rather, the thing that's rushed in to fill the vacuum where fear once swelled--fear's opposite: love--is so complete that it's palpable. Unnerving, even. He's a "loving person", of course, who says and does loving things--unassumingly spending every Christmas Eve in prison with New Hampshire's worst women offenders, to cite one of hundreds of examples. But the love one feels in his presence is too diffused, too invisibly luminous, too strange, to originate in anything he says or does. It's simply something that he is--or for which he serves as a vessel."

In that article, Robinson also points out that "Do not be afraid" is the most consistent message we hear in the scriptures coming from God. It's what we heard today in Paul's letter to the Romans: you have received a spirit of adoption--a spirit of freedom-- the spirit that speaks to God as Abba--daddy, -- do not fall back into slavery to fear. The whole creation waits groaning in labor pains--waiting for the revealing of the freedom and the glory of the children of God.

Fear and Slavery versus the Spirit and freedom--that's what it boils down to in that passage.

And yet I believe people in general, and church people in particular, continue to be controlled by fear. Some of that enslavement is coming through how people read the Bible. Part of the reason why we need to have to claim our own experience, to have our own spiritual practices, is because if we read the Bible from a Spirit of fear--it's a fearful message we get back.

There's no better example than the fearful spin Matthew puts on Jesus' parable today. Here is this wonderful parable of the weeds, about how you need to not judge, lest in doing so you harm what is most vital. It's a parable about tolerance and patience and compassion as opposed to the kinds of actions fear would lead us to. But in his interpretation of it, Matthew makes it into a story of vengeance and hate and fear and how God is going to cast the unrighteous into a fiery furnace at the end of the age. There are not many passages like this in the New Testament, but somehow our fearful hearts have seized on them. Their message of hell fire and brimstone has

totally undermined the vision of the God of love, and freedom, and compassion that Jesus upheld.

In our sick culture, sick church, we need to recover and witness to the vision of the God of love and freedom that Gene Robinson upholds--even if it's a costly witness.

Lastly, I just want to add that this past week I saw the movie "Gonzo", which is a film about the writer Hunter Thompson. What struck me most in the movie was his capturing a moment in time--a brief era-- when a large proportion of Americans seemed no longer controlled by fear and were able to set in motion some profound changes around things that had previously been held in fear: race, communism and anti-communism, social norms etc.. He then also describes the descent back into fear and the politicians who present themselves as the antidote to fear but who are, in fact, simply masters at manipulating the fearful.

I believe our future as a country, and as a world, depends upon our having a spiritual revolution in this country, a revolution in which people reclaim their lives from the dominion of fear. (This doesn't mean never being afraid--that wouldn't even be a good thing.) But it does mean not being controlled by our fears, not letting our fears dictate how we see others and approach others, not letting fear limit our imaginations as to what's possible.

And if we are willing God is able, and if we are ready, God has already gone ahead to prepare a way for us. Amen.