

The 6th Sunday of Easter ~ Year A
April 27, 2008
The Reverend Mary Lee Bergeron

“God Of Hope Before Us, God Of Healing Within Us,
God Of Mercy Above Us, Come Be With Us.”

Ps. 66:7-18 Acts 17:22-31, 1 Peter 3:13-23 John 14: 15 – 21

*God of hope before us, God of healing within us, God of mercy above us, Come be with us.
— Amen*

When I watch or read the news I become more aware of all the pain and suffering in our world. Often I ask myself how I or how we can find hope in the midst of suffering?

Yet today our scripture lessons give us guidance and hope. In Acts Paul says, “God is never far from us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’”; The Epistle of Peter tells us to ‘have no fear of suffering and to not be troubled.’ In the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples, “I will not leave you desolate.”

Those are comforting and hopeful words. However, I find that when trauma, illness, suffering for any reason comes to us, it is hard to hear or believe those words. Sometimes we need help in hearing them at a level that can touch our hearts and minds and spirits.

Once when I was at U.T. Hospital in the chaplaincy program I was on night duty. The nursing staff called me to come to their floor to visit a woman who was very distressed and hysterical. The nurse said “this woman is to be discharged tomorrow and has no where to go! Her family says that there is no way she can live with them anymore and she says she has no money to rent a room.

When I get to her room I find her, sitting up with I.V.’s in both arms. She is crying while trying to knit. She gradually shares parts of her story – how she came to be living in Knoxville in this fix; how family squabbles divisions had increased, especially after her husband died. Then in e addition to this she had been diagnosed with a serious illness.

She talks about her joys and sorrows. As she shares about her past and her faith she tells about a verse of scripture she used after a difficult surgery. She used that verse to help her relax enough to sleep. God's word had helped her.

But quickly she remembers her current plight and her anxiety returns. She starts shaking and crying and gasping out the words, "What is going to happen to me tomorrow? Where can I go? Where will I go? Will I be alone? I just can't make it alone!"

Frankly I had no clue how to help. Her plight was desperate. I did say that I would call the social worker the next morning to make sure she was following all possible avenues.

As we continue talking her anxiety increases. She begins shaking. I say, 'you shared earlier with me about using a scripture verse to help you with a difficult time in the past. Is there a verse that can help you get through this night?'

We sit in silence for awhile. Finally in a quiet voice she says, "In my Father's House are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you". We both smiled at each other - many mansions - surely many rooms. I could feel her anxiety slipping away. I help her get in bed and we pray together that she will find a space. Somehow I knew she would be all right. And by the way things did gradually work out for her; in fact one of her daughters took her home.

What happens when we find ourselves asking the questions, Where can I go? How can I possibly live through this situation or illness? Where is my hope? Who will help me? Actually we do have good news - especially in John's Gospel. Jesus says "I will not leave you desolate ... I will come to you", Remember the new commandment he gave to his disciples at the last supper. It is that 'you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another'.

Jesus promises his followers (us included) that God will give us a counselor to dwell with and in us. This means we are never be alone! Sometimes we are so worn down, so overwhelmed that we feel alone. And then the mystery happens. Through the love or help of others, through tears or prayers; we find a way to connect with the Holy Spirit in us, our Comforter and find peace and hope. When others touch our lives or we reach out to love others, we begin to see with new eyes and relax.

Parker Palmer in the book, *The Active Life*, gives an example of how this works. He tells of a several times in his life when he experiences deep depression. Even though he has a home (unlike the lady I mentioned earlier) he too says, “What is going to happen to me? Where can I go for help?” I can’t live alone!

During those times there are various friends who try to help him – to rescue him with well-intended encouragement and advice.

In the midst of his depression one friend takes a different approach.. Every afternoon around four p.m. he visits. He helps Palmer get out of bed into a chair, removes his shoes, and massaged his feet. He hardly says a word, but he is there, he is present with Palmer. He is a lifeline for him, a link to other humans. This friend has no need to solve or fix or change. He just knows the meaning of compassion.

This friend of Palmer Parker was sent. He was sent by God to share the gift of the Holy Spirit. You see that is what love is all about. From what I have heard since joining you here at Ascension, the Holy Spirit is at work through you – helping those who feel lonely, ill, desolate, forgotten or depressed

For each of us is needed, but not only needed, we are commanded to love and to show compassion. And others will know we are Christians by our love. We are not alone. And yes, we can and will find hope in our lives. *Amen*