

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 6th 2014

Paul's letter surely stung the brothers and sisters in Corinth. When one is in a condition of being inflated, it is tough to have someone let the air out. But it is surely a prerequisite to being filled with something more substantial, perhaps something God-breathed.

I had the misfortune of experiencing a head injury and broken wrist this past summer. Inflammation is a necessary part of that experience. Despite healing in my bones, my hand remains swollen and I am now wearing a compression glove to move the fluid out. Compression is uncomfortable. But sometimes we need to be squeezed to return to good order.

Paul seems to be focusing on the other things that fill us, which are not always so easily recognized. When pride or its close cousins which cause us to trust in other things (including riches, power, and pleasure) are filling us, we cannot be filled by God. In so many ways, the message here tracks the beatitudes. It also tracks Mary's prayer, which we read on her feast day. When we think we are full, we are sent away dissatisfied in the reality of our emptiness. When we recognize our emptiness, we can be filled.

Lest we think this epiphany is a singular event or activity, think again. If we are honest with ourselves, we often experience self-satisfaction and emptiness in the same day. Paul's words, "when ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently", remind me that I have a long way to go in achieving this kind of orientation toward others. I often have a short fuse, probably because my own interests figure heavily in my calculus of what is necessary and proper. Fortunately, as the Psalmist reminds us, the Lord is near to all who call upon him. When we call in the midst of our need, we can receive. In the midst of giving snarky responses to those who offend us, perhaps not so much.

But God is still near, even when we miss him. Can we find the energy to pause and cry out for help? I had dinner with a friend tonight who shared a miracle in his own life – God granted room in his heart to love someone he found difficult. That is a good miracle to ask for, no?

The Gospel reminds us that great freedom comes from being with Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, the disciples are walking through a wheat field, picking out kernels and eating them. I have done this many times, and it is a pleasure to taste the new kernels that are maturing. However, I did not do so out of a need for food; perhaps the disciples were just really hungry and doubly glad for the nourishment. The Pharisees temporarily disrupted this pleasure by challenging their conduct based on

their laws. Jesus effortlessly defended his disciples, silencing the critics with a powerful claim about his lordship. I wonder what the disciples thought. It probably felt good to be defended.

Defend us, also, Lord Jesus. Help us to remain near to you so that we can be free, even if it means experiencing some uncomfortable compression to restore us to the life we need. And bring us room to love, even when our hearts are crowded with our own desires. Thanks be to God.

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