

Sermon by The Rev. Gary Schroeder

Over the last several months, I've noticed something about myself. In my conversations, I've caught myself increasingly making reference to the "good old days." In speaking to my son, in talking with friends, in visits with members, I've found that phrase, or something very similar to it, coming up over and over again.

Now, I have to admit, hearing those words as they tumble out of my mouth leaves me feeling rather old. In fact, I'm pretty sure that I now sound exactly like my grandmother used to sound.

But then, last Monday happened. And suddenly, I began to feel that maybe I wasn't old; that maybe I was right. All those lives lost, all that senseless pain and violence. What do you say in the face of such a monumental tragedy? What do you do? I know that we

never had to deal with anything like that in my growing-up years!

Now, interestingly enough, about a month ago, I shared all of my thoughts and feelings about the “good old days” with a friend of mine, and he had a rather interesting response. “Gary,” he said, “a poor memory may be one of God’s most precious gifts. For most of us, it’s not that the ‘good old days’ were all that good. It’s more that, over time, we’ve managed to forget about the bad things that happened, or at least forget about the pain that accompanied the bad things, while at the same time we’ve succeeded in embellishing the good things.”

It was an observation that made me stop and think. Could my friend be on to something? I thought about my grandmother, the one for whom I said the “good old days” were a constant theme. The truth is she lived through the

worst days of the Depression with three small children to care for. Her husband, my grandfather lost almost everything. For them, for awhile, there was no money and no job, only despair and disappointment. And yet, those were the days that my grandmother insisted on calling the “good old days.”

My friend had to be right. God had granted my grandmother the gift of a poor memory. That was the only plausible explanation.

Or was it?

In the wake of last Monday’s killing spree, I think it must be said that there is yet another possibility, a better and more accurate understanding, in which God doesn’t obliterate the pain of human existence with the gift of a poor memory, but actually redeems it by working to bring peace and healing to our fear and brokenness. Sure, it

would be nice if, through prayer, we could have God simply delete all the painful experiences of life so we would never have to deal with them. But God has chosen to do something different. For, you see, rather than remove the bad parts, God instead becomes deeply and intimately involved in them. God jumps into the midst of life's suffering and works tirelessly to mend our brokenness and alleviate our pain. Then God goes on to give us the gift of remembering—remembering how that divine, healing presence came to us in the midst of our trouble, and how it strengthened us and gave us hope.

For an excellent illustration of what I'm talking about, just look at this morning's Psalm. Those verses certainly don't reflect some naïve, unrealistic happiness. Nor were they written by one who had never known pain. Not at all! Psalm 30 is a word from a brokenhearted individual who

cried out to God for help. And the psalmist tells us how his desperate cries were received: “Lord, you have turned my wailing into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.” In other words, the good news is that God was there for the psalmist, not helping him to forget, but helping him to see and to understand that, when he cried out, the Lord lifted him up. God renewed him. God strengthened him and God gave him hope for the future.

And, folks, that was no isolated incident. In fact, it’s a pattern that is repeated over and over and over again. For instance, this morning’s Gospel. The disciples, professional fishermen, are out on the Sea of Tiberias doing their job. But, after casting their nets all night long, they’re rowing back toward the shore with absolutely nothing to show for their efforts.

I can imagine how concerned and disappointed they must have been. After all, that night on the water was no father-son outing. It was their livelihood. They needed a regular and steady catch of fish in order to survive.

But, then Jesus came to them and told them where to drop their nets. And they found so many fish they could hardly make it to dry land. In the disciples' time of need, Jesus was present. He acted as a guide to provide a catch of fish that they simply could not have anticipated following their night of failed fishing. Into the midst of their deep concern and disappointment, the Risen Christ came with both help and assistance.

And so, just as it was with our Psalm, we find that the principal message of our gospel passage is also about hope and deliverance. It's about the unfortunate experiences of today being finally redeemed by a Presence that steps into

our pain and suffering and works tirelessly to bring wholeness out of our brokenness, to bring light into our darkness, and to transform death into life, crucifixion into resurrection.

My friends, I hardly have to say it. All of us here have just lived through one horrific week. This morning, Easter is needed more than ever with its message of hope in the midst of life's pain and life's mysteries. And hope is the clear and strong message not only of today's readings, but of all of scripture. For, to paraphrase St. Paul, neither death nor senseless violence and pain, neither things present nor things to come, neither shock, nor grief, nor disbelief, nor anything else in all of creation will ever succeed in separating us from the love and the power of God that is ours through Christ Jesus. The love and the power of God—they are here with us today to redeem and overcome

the pain and the brokenness of the past week! They are  
here with us today to heal our community and to restore our  
hope! They are here with us today!