

Epiphany 2C, Saint John's Olney, 20 January 2019

The Reverend Henry P. McQueen

Isaiah 62:1-5: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11: John 2:1-11: Psalm 36:5-10

S.D.G.

As part of a recent house cleaning of my mother's home I came across a set of 4 small books all written by Maurice Sendak. I don't know if I was the only one in my family to read those books, but as the youngest I was certainly the last to cherish them and call them my own.

Among these 4 miniature volumes were the books Alligators all around, Chicken Soup with rice, One was Johnny, and perhaps my favorite, Pierre. I suspect that Pierre became my favorite because of the repetition that my mother exercised in attempting to get me to understand and follow the message of the story. You see, Pierre was a boy who didn't care.

*There was once a boy named Pierre
Who only would say, I don't care!
Read his story, my friend, for you'll find
At the end that a suitable
Moral lies there*

*One day his mother said
When Pierre climbed out of bed
Good morning, darling boy, you are my only joy
Pierre said I don't care!
What would you like to eat?
I don't care!
Some lovely cream of wheat?
I don't care!
Don't sit backwards in your chair
I don't care!
Or pour syrup on your hair
I don't care!*

*You are acting like a clown
I don't care!
And we have to go to town
I don't care!
Don't you want to come, my dear?
I don't care!
Would you rather stay right here?
I don't care!
So his mother left him there*

His father also left him there, and that is when the story gets interesting. Pierre is visited by a lion; a rather polite, if not hungry lion. Pierre's response to the lion was the same as his response to his parents. The story continues:

*Then I'll eat you, if I may
I don't care!
So the lion ate Pierre....*

Pierre's parents arrived home to find a sick lion in bed. Asking the lion where was Pierre, the lion answered "I don't care". So...

*They rushed the lion into town
The doctor shook him up and down
And when the lion gave a roar
Pierre fell out upon the floor
He rubbed his eyes and scratched his head
And laughed because he wasn't dead
His mother cried and held him tight
His father asked, are you alright?
Pierre said I am feeling fine
Please take me home, it's half past nine*

*The lion said, if you would care
To climb on me, I'll take you there
Then everyone looked at Pierre*

*Who shouted yes, indeed, I care!
The lion took them home to rest
And stayed on as a weekend guest*

Pierre finally learned to care. I was reminded of this story because of how Jesus responds to his mother's call that the wine has run out; Jesus says "what concern is that to you and me?"

Regardless of this particular comment, if Jesus had lived his life as did Pierre by saying "what concern is that to you and me" we would likely not be gathered here today. But Jesus did care, Jesus did respond with actions. Jesus protected the reputation of the wedding host. But more importantly, Jesus showed who he was, he revealed his glory.

Within the timeline of Epiphany the miracle at the wedding in Cana is preceded by the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, a story that we missed last week due to the snow. But within John's Gospel, the wedding miracle is preceded by the gathering of the disciples. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael had all just started to follow Jesus. This miracle showed them that they were following the true light. It was a sign to them to keep going because they were on the correct path.

Jesus' actions were sure to bring attention to him, but he acted regardless of the consequences, he acted regardless of the cost. Jesus often tries to keep a low profile, Mark's Gospel is especially known for the way Jesus tried to keep his actions and his divinity a secret. After a particular healing story in Mark(1:40...) Jesus told the now healed leper "*See that you say nothing to anyone*" and as we have come to expect the leper "*went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly.*" At the next town the crowds were so great that they removed the roof of the home where he was and lowered a man down through the hole in the roof. He healed on the Sabbath knowing it would cause trouble. Jesus healed people regardless of the consequences. He spoke up and he acted. Regardless of his response to his mother when the wine ran out, he did care.

There are times, large and small, when we all are called to speak out.

Martin Niemöller was a German naval officer during WWI and an enthusiastic supporter of the Third Reich. He was also, following his navy career, a Lutheran pastor. As the Nazi leadership became more oppressive towards the Christian church he stood his ground and with several colleagues met with, soon to be chancellor, Adolph Hitler to complain. It was after this meeting that he saw the evil within Hitler and began to speak out against the regime; but he never spoke out about how his Jewish brothers and sisters were being treated. Niemöller was imprisoned for 7 years. In the post war era he apologized to his Jewish brothers and sisters saying I have sinned against you and your people. Niemöller recognized that he missed the calling to speak out, he is now most known for this poem:

*First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out— because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

Tomorrow the nation will pause to remember someone who spoke out, someone who acted. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail Martin Luther King Jr wrote very clearly how disappointed he was with the actions, or more accurately the inactions, of the Christian church. While some spoke out against segregation and racism, most kept silent. While some marched with their brothers and sisters of color, most urged them to be patient and allow things to work out over time.

King wrote *“There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”*

Jesus acted despite the consequences. Jesus acted because it was his very being to do so. Like Jesus, we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit; it is now part of our very being to speak out and to act. “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest”. The prophet Isaiah implores us to speak out, to act, for the sake of God and the Word of God. We are to be people who care. We are to care

for matters large and small. We are to care for matters that affect us, and matters that affect those around us. When it is time, and be assured it will never be a convenient time, prepare to stand up, to speak out, to act, in the name of Jesus and the love of God. Regardless of the consequences, be an extremist – speak out.

Sitting in a jail cell in Birmingham King wrote: "But as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love? -- "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice? -- "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ? -- "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist? -- "Here I stand; I can do no other so help me God." Was not John Bunyan an extremist? -- "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a mockery of my conscience." Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist? -- "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist? -- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremists we will be."

Be an extremist for Christ our Lord.

Amen,