

5 Epiphany

February 8, 2015

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Isaiah 40:21-31

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

Yesterday we held the funeral service for Ann Tyler. There was a surprise waiting for us, and I want to share the surprise with you. In preparation for that service I had conversations over the past two weeks with Ann's children; Cathryn, Scott, Steve, and Tracy. Among the planning details for the service, I asked how many people we might expect, so I could prepare a proper number of bulletins, and so that a few of us could arrange the Parish Hall for a reception afterward. Tracy said that she would expect about 40 family friends. I estimated 30 from our church family. Julie counted the attendance yesterday at 145. I remember Ann telling me – several times – that she didn't have many friends, but she loved the close friends she had. Yesterday I met 145 of her close friends.

Something that happens informally at these gatherings is that they are a time for people to share stories with each other about what stands highest in their memory of that person. Yesterday I heard about Ann's love for teaching, square dancing, writing poetry, and cultivating friendships that lasted a lifetime. Her daughter Tracy used the same words I have heard Ann say before, that these were friends she could call at 3 AM if she needed to. These things taken together seem to me a great definition of what was a fulfilling life for Ann.

In our Gospel lesson today, there are a few more examples of this living of a fulfilling life. Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law from being bed-ridden with a fever. When the fever left her, she immediately began to serve Jesus and the four disciples he brought with him. I think she must have been a Martha-type of person. She was fulfilled by being of service to people. Yesterday, Edy, Julie, Frances, Dot, and Margaret came to set up. As our expected attendance of 70 became 145, I saw them start getting extra bulletins, carrying the chairs they had set up in the Parish Hall back into this Worship Hall, and then Emil, Tom, Carol, and I'm not sure who else, SERVED everyone who had come. I saw abundant life all over this place.

In this same Gospel story, after Jesus had healed Simon's mother-in-law, people came from everywhere to get some of that healing for themselves. Scripture says that 'the whole city was gathered around the door', waiting to be healed. Jesus told his disciples that his purpose, the reason he came into the world, was to proclaim

God's Kingdom (not to spend all of his time healing), and so he left after healing some of the people. But while he went away to preach about God, this passage says that he kept healing people. Isn't it interesting that the core purpose God had given him was to teach, but Jesus was not fulfilled without healing as well as teaching. It was part of who he was, and it gave him a sense of abundance to be able to heal.

In the passage from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, I am caught by his statement, "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel". It was not just a responsibility he felt. It fulfilled him to know he was using every gift God gave him, every ounce of his own physical strength and ability to articulate what he knew in his heart to be true.

Jesus said of his sheep, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (Jn 10:10)

Paul said, "We were (therefore) buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

What fulfills you?

Serving others?

Nurturing relationships so that they might last?

Asking God to walk with you today, and then seeing where God showed himself?

Abundant life is pretty difficult – maybe impossible – to accomplish by seeking abundant life. But if we instead build into our life the practice of trusting God to be there, and trusting God to show Himself through the circumstances of our day, and through the people we encounter, then, as we look at the examples I have talked with you about this morning, of people who have experienced fulfillment, we can enjoy that sense now; in this life; today.

Jesus came to teach us what God had sent him to teach, to make us aware of the fulfilling life that most of us overlook, or completely miss out on, because we are too busy just taking care of today's business. Our to-do list is too overcrowded to have time for paying attention to God's whisper in our spirits to pay attention to what really, really, deeply matters; to what is already present around us that can fulfill us. What fulfills you? What can you do or change for that thing to be possible?

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Amen.