

Broken Heats
Jeremiah 31:31
March 25, 2012
Preached at Old St. Pat's
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I propose to show although our hearts have been broken open in pain, we can use that pain to obliterate the barriers that separate and divide us and create something new, something different, something more so that those hearing this sermon need no longer feel stymied and helpless to make a difference in our city.

Come Holy Spirit—
and enkindle within us
the fire of your burning love.
In your Holy Name we pray.

Good Morning.
My name is Bonnie Perry.
I'm the rector
or senior pastor at All Saints' Episcopal church
on the North side
up in Ravenswood. To give you
just a bit of information about myself-
-to situate me in your mind.
I'm the oldest of four
raised in an Irish Catholic Marine Corps family.
I'm a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross
in Massachusetts
and I spent a year after college
just before seminary
in the Jesuit Volunteer corps-JVC.
Holy Cross and JVC—
completely and utterly
up-ended my life—
for which I am eternally grateful.

[Father Tom, Christa,]
I am so very honored
to be here with all of you this morning.

I am aware
of a great deal of pain these days:
a sadness

that has settled on me
like fog rolling in from the Lake.
It chills my skin,
saps my spirit
and clouds my vision.
Some of the pain
is my own
the not so unusual feeling
many of us rise with every morning
of being over scheduled
and under-rested.
The heaviness that comes
from wondering
when we might be able
to squirrel away an hour or so
just for ourselves
when loved ones,
little ones,
and colleagues from work
aren't asking for something from us.

Another portion of that pain
leaches into my soul
in the grief I feel
as parishioners and friends:
lose jobs,
face surgery,
mourn unexpected deaths,
wrestle with chronic pain
and lament an ebbing sense
of God's presence in their lives.
This is, I think
in spite of the unexpected March blossoms on the trees,
a heavy time, a desert time,
a truly Lenten time.

There is also a pain
beyond the personal.
A public pain:
a grief and lament we may feel
for a city
where more than 600 of our young people

have been killed since 2008.
32 young people murdered in this city
in the first 3 months of this year.
A pain magnified by
the seemingly senseless death
of Trayvan Martin in Florida.

I was on the phone earlier in the week
and Annette Nance Holt said to me,
“What would be helpful for you to hear?
Do you want to know how he died—
or what he was like alive?”
To which I replied I know how your son died,
I’d like to know more about how he lived.

And so she began
to tell me about her son,
her only son, 16 year old Blair Holt.
Blair’s mom,
Annett is a captain in the Chicago Fire Department.
His Dad
is a gang prevention officer
with the Chicago Police Department.
Blair as his mom said,
was the child,
if you could go to a department store
and shop for a child,
he would be the one
you would gift wrap
and bring home with you.

An honor student,
good looking
the girl’s were crazy about him.
Going to church, writing raps
despairing about kids
getting high and gang banging.
A young man who made sure
that he and his grandfather
who suffered from Alzheimer’s—
Blair made sure that the two of them
always had matching Nike shoes and sweatshirts.

Blair, you may remember
was the young person
on May 10, 2007,
who while riding a CTA bus
on his way to school,
pushed his friend Tierra Reed,
down on the bus floor
and shielded her body with his
as a shooter opened fire
that wretched Spring day.

What do we say
to Annette Holt
who now deeply regrets
what she said to her son
every morning
as he left for school.
“I love you baby—now—you go do good.”
She said, “He died, doing good.”

What do we say—
what do we say—
what more can we say, than,
“We wish to see Jesus.”
We wish to see God—
We need God.
We need something more
for our hearts are pierced,
torn open and flayed by sadness.

The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah
also lived in heart-rending times.
In 626 BC as the world of that day
teetered on its edge,
he was intimately and viscerally aware
of personal, public and national despair.

By 587 BC Jerusalem would be conquered,
overrun by the Babylonians.
Their temple destroyed,

the city ravaged
and the leaders
all either exiled or killed.
And Jeremiah was reviled
by his people for predicting it all.

And yet, and yet
as he is being forcibly removed from his city,
in the last chapters of his book
hear the words he writes
from God to the people,
*"The time is coming,
declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel
... it won't be like the old covenant
they broke that one,
this one I will engrave upon their hearts,
they will no longer need
to teach each other, to know the Lord,
because they will know me,
from the least to the greatest,
and I will remember their sins no more.*

They had nothing left,
except the voice of a prophet
and the promises of God.
The God who says:
I will never ever give up on you,
I will never ever leave you.

This covenant is not an external law
that we can read from a distance,
not rules written that we see with our eyes
but rather Jeremiah and God
are talking about a covenant,
engraved on our hearts,
the very pulse of our God
embedded in lives,
that will not allow us
to go back to the despair
and isolation of being alone.

There is a rabbinic teaching that says
God breaks open our hearts
so that God's covenant can be poured into them.

When our hearts are broken open,
when we are sick with sorrow,
it is then that there is room,
there is space for a new relationship with God
, because it is then that we realize
that ONLY God can—offer us hope—
only God can sustain us.

It is that sorrow and compassion,
it is that same heartbreak,
that sorrow, if channeled in the right direction
that can erode the walls that separate us.
It is that sorrow and compassion
that erodes the walls
that separate and divide us
that compassion that can enable us
to embody and live out
God's hope and promise to us for our world.

The poet, Mary Oliver says this in piece entitled "Lead"

I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
to the rest of the world.

How then do we do this,
how do we live this?
In many, many ways—
one of which will take place here
in this sanctuary on Monday evening
of Holy Week, APRIL 2
when hundreds of people will come together
to walk through a portion
of our city publicly lamenting
the senseless deaths of our young people.

Old St. Pat's is joining with my congregation, All Saints,
some 40 other partners
including the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago
and the Roman Catholic archdiocese,
to walk four miles through our city
praying
calling even more attention
to our city's families
who have suffered
the unimaginable loss of a child.

In our sadness,
our heart-rending pain—
may we come together for Annette Holt,
in memory of Blair Holt
may we come together to do good.

To create a new covenant of hope for all.

In Christ's name—I pray.

Amen.