

Aug 2 2009  
St James Episcopal Church  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 13  
The Rev. Kathy Crary

Story about St. Lazarus coffee from Benedictine Archabbey in LaTraub, Pennsylvania. Since we've had so little humor about being Episcopalian or Anglican, I wanted to share a story to start from National Public Radio this morning. The oldest Benedictine Abbey in the US is located in Latrobe, PA. One of the first things they did was open a grist mill to support the brothers gathered there. They created a school, now a college and seminary. At one point, they brewed beer. I guess some folks in town called the Order of St. Benedict, OSB, as the Order of Sacred Beers.

In the bottom part of the grist mill is a large area turned over to the students of the college for a coffee shop. They were responsible for designing the space, running the space, pulling the espressos, figuring out the menu. Folks meet, study, drink coffee, you know the drill. But the thing that caught my attention was one of the products on the menu. You can order a cup of St. Lazarus' Coffee. Yep, you got out. Coffee that will help you rise from the dead. Or maybe rise from bed, though at a certain ago we think those are the same thing!

On to what I want to talk about this morning, which has nothing to do with the coffee story.

In John's Gospel, scholars debate influence over it's authors. Hellenic and Hebraic influence wins out? Okay, so you're saying fine, who cares or maybe "What did you just say?"

The question is about influence and who had the most in the writing of this gospel: The faith of the church in Jerusalem, or the philosophy of the churches in Ephesus, Corinth and in the other Mediterranean countries where Paul and his followers were preaching.

Like everything else, there is the pendulum effect, depending on new information that influences theology, biblical history and stuff like archaeology. Like politics in a congregation (LEAN ONE WAY), or politics in the US (LEAN THE OTHER WAY). Or maybe Diocesan politics (BACK) or family relationships (LEAN FORWARD). So goes the scholarship around biblical authorship, content and meaning. But first, a non-rhetorical question, and I mean for someone to shout out an answer:

**QUESTION:** In the local communities of the Jewish faith, what was the holiest item in the community? What was the most sacred moment when the group gathered? (WAIT FOR TORAH). Yep, the TORAH.

The importance of the Torah cannot be overstated. Here is the story of a people and their belief systems, their liturgy, their celebrations and observances were based in this set of scrolls, meticulously hand-copied over centuries and handed to us, as Christians, as a sacred word about sacred actions and the relationship God has forged with the human race.

If you have attended temple or synagogue and watched the scrolls brought forth for reading, what a marvelous and enlightening experience it is. And on Simchat Torah, a celebration of reading the “last” in a series of readings, and I think roughly equivalent to our

Christ the King Sunday leading up to Advent, there is the procession and dance that accompanies the reading. And sometimes there is a small stylus that is used to help the reader understand where she/he is in the text. All these ceremonies are reflected in our own gospel processions and in the “pointing” of the services by a deacon, another priest or a Eucharistic Minister, running a finger down the margin to show the celebrant where we are in the service. You can get caught up in the wonder of presiding and you can drop your place visually. In some medieval examples of this little point, there is a hand at the end of it with a finger pointing. I call it the forerunner of the computer screen’s cursor!

But in my preparations for today’s sermon, here is the part that caught my eye and heart about today’s lesson:

The scrolls of Torah, by various rabbinic scholars in history, have been compared to or called salt, leaven, light, water and bread.

When I read this the light went on. In the Gospels we hear about Jesus being the light of the world, the bread of life, the living water. Now the first 14 verses of John’s Gospel open up for me. I’m sure Marcus Borg and Bishop John Spong are applauding as I make a connection here.

Jesus is the Torah made flesh, Jesus is the manna in the wilderness that is true bread for the whole person, and not for the stomach only. Jesus is the light that started on the mountain top with the Moses and the Commandments and now is light for the whole world.

Here is the new covenant with God, through Jesus Christ.

And we are the new covenant, too. We are the continuation of that Word made flesh. The Gospel of Matthew calls us lights on top of a bushel basket and the salt of the earth. So it is that we are bread to be broken and shared, called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and this covenant we have made with God. How we do this, as Episcopalians in the Tri-City area is the work of the Spirit in the hearts of all of us, God's people.

And the knowledge that the experience of Pentecost means we are the Torah and the Word, as Jesus said we would do what he did and greater things. And his Spirit would be poured out upon us. All we need to do is build our confidence that this is so.

How, then, we will do what the post-communion prayer says, the work God has given us to do? That is our calling and our mission.