

March 20, 2009
The Funeral of Harry Brumbaugh
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St James Episcopal Church

The people who put the readings together for use in certain services have a term for the “cut out” portion that we read. It is called a pericope. Now, when I first saw the word I didn’t pronounce it well, thinking it was said Pair-uh-cope. But it is per ick oh pee. Who knew, looking at it. The Gospel reading for today, taken from the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, is cut out of the center of a story that relates to my thoughts about Harry Brumbaugh.

The Gospel of John substitutes metaphor for parable and stands out as different from the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Jesus has been healing people in the previous chapters. These miracles of healing generate some energy about who this Jesus is, and crowds begin to follow him, either to be healed or to watch. Now he is looking out over a large crowd and asks one of the disciples how he plans to feed all these people. The disciple manages to marshal the resources of one small lad, his lunch of bread and fish, probably roughly equivalent to a couple of dinner rolls and a tin of sardines. Exercising an enormous understanding of crowd control, Jesus has the group sit down. Breaking the bread and praying over the lunch, the entire huge crowd was fed. Of course, knowing human nature as we do, the crowds continue to follow him. The Gospel makes it really clear they are following him for FOOD.

Jesus then responds with our lesson, I am the bread of life. Beyond bread for the body, there is the hope for the soul. In the Christian church, that hope for the world is found in Jesus Christ. He states here that there is food for the soul that lasts longer than the food for the body. He urges us to know there is a difference and to believe in this other kind of bread that feeds the deepest hungering in each of us.

Harry seemed to be one who marshaled resources, too. And that is why I picked the Gospel lesson we read this afternoon. Jesus seemed to have this knack for taking some small thing and amplifying some quality of it to make it stand out.

Harry amplified, expanded and increased things that he touched.

Harry wasn’t just involved in the community, he held an office that allowed him some impact on water management and resources as the Bay Area was growing but

the supply of water couldn't grow as quickly. How do you take a little water and do more with it. That was one of Harry's tasks.

What else can you take that is little and make it bigger, better or more valuable? I was stunned to hear Harry collected pollen. Now that is something small, this means really teeny small itty-bitty! The family told me he collected the pollen and gave it to pharmaceutical companies to help allergy treatments. That's multiplication of resources...and the work they do helps people like me that fight through allergy symptoms 24/7/365.

Harry married a teacher. They had two daughters, both landed smack dab in the teachers' world. Both of those daughters are teachers, placed, like their parents, in the world of education. The teaching and learning he did has been multiplied into their lives. Both Diana and Jill were raised by parents who nurtured the love of learning and the call of public service. And now they will touch others' lives and instill in them the value of education and the significance of that public service.

It was not lost on me when the family told me Harry had a boat named *Beezo*. I don't have history on the name, but he would go fishing, commercial fishing. So it was with Jesus' disciples, many of them fisherfolk, commercial fisherfolk. Jesus recruited a motley band, an interesting assortment, which became the foundation for the Christian faith, in all its expressions. Even from a sociologist's perspective, it is an outstanding feat.

That brings us to this gathering. We are here because of one man who expressed his wishes to his family to have a memorial service.

The family admits, quite openly, to being a little surprised with Harry's request to have his funeral here. In the hospital some weeks before he died, he made it clear he wanted a memorial service and said it should be at St. James. Many years ago Harry and his family attended church here. Harry and Barbara's wedding was here. At least one of the girls was baptized here. Harry received some kind of nourishment here that prompted his request. The family has granted this request and so we have gathered.

The gospel lesson, partway through the reading, gives a hint to God's economy of things. Whatever God has given to Jesus in and for his ministry will not be lost. In some level, beyond our understanding or intellect, beyond our predictions and our expectations, God placed some kind of stamp on Harry and Harry didn't forget it.

Now we are here, together in a way that will not be repeated in time and space. We have heard of feeding many with a little, we have witnessed a life that understood that, in a man who was told he had six months to live and multiplied it into eighteen, who took small things and multiplied them for the good for so many of us.

We mourn his passing; we know that hole in the heart will be filled by no one else. We hear his reminder to learn and to teach. May we also heed his example of sacrifice and service. Finally, we acknowledge his response to God in bringing us here today, giving thanks to God for the life Harry lived among us.