

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 15 Year B – Revised Common Lectionary
August 16, 2009
St. James' Episcopal Church, Pullman, WA
The Rev. Mary Beth Rivetti, Rector

Ephesians 5:15-20

This week the church's calendar was full of commemorations, from Clare of Assisi to the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary. From Jeremy Taylor to Jonathan Myrick Daniels. Florence Nightingale, who was just added officially to the list of commemorations of holy women and holy men celebrated by the Episcopal Church, shares a feast day with Hippolytus of Rome, who died in the third century, possibly a martyr, maybe a bishop, but a prolific writer of Biblical commentaries, and composer of a text that preserves the traditions of the church as he already knew them, traditions that he felt needed to be set down because already in two hundred years after the mystery of Christ's incarnation, the church had, in his estimation, gone astray, and needed to remember how it had been done from the earliest times.

From Hippolytus we learn the shape of the Eucharistic prayer; we learn the forms for ordination, and the distinction on the types of leadership that people may be called to. We learn that a priest or bishop is ordained by laying on of hands, for example. But someone who has been given the Spirit of healing is appointed, not ordained, because the gift is clearly a gift of God that cannot be conferred by the institution of the church. After throwing in every possible contingency and situation he can imagine, he concludes, "If we have omitted anything, beloved ones, God will reveal it to those who are worthy, steering Holy Church to her mooring in the quiet haven." (AC 43.4) And over the millenia Holy Church has indeed added and subtracted a few things – fighting to the death over some of them, but always seeking the perfect way in which to fill ourselves with the Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts.

This week also marked the passing of two giants of the church in the 20th century. John Coburn served as Bishop of Western Massachusetts. But before that, from 1967 to 1976, he served as President of the House of Deputies, the senior house of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. These were the years when the supreme governing body of the Episcopal Church was making incredible decisions in the midst of powerful and momentous times. When women were admitted to ordained ministry in the church, when the church began its long attempt at coming to understand its inclusion of lesbian and gay members, when the church took national leadership in opposing an unjust war, and finally stepped out in front as an ally in combating racism. Under his leadership of the House of Deputies, the church set in motion the process that resulted in the 1979 version of the Book of Common Prayer - the book that is still so quaintly termed by many of my friends and colleagues as "the new prayer book."

One of the principal movers of the Standing Liturgical Commission, charged with the work of compiling that Book of Common Prayer, the official order of worship for all members of the Episcopal Church, Marion Hatchett, also died this past week. One of the key features of the Book of Common Prayer – which is the basis for all our worship, even what we print in your individual worship booklet – is the emphasis on the ministry of all the baptized. In my youth, not only were women not allowed to read from holy scripture, not only were girls not allowed to carry the cross or light the candles, but lay people were only just starting to have permission to step up to the lectern to read from Holy Scripture. By bringing baptism up front and center, by connecting the sacrament of water and spirit with the sacrament of bread and wine, the "new" Prayer Book shook up the church tremendously, proclaiming that everyone here in the pew has authority as a Christian to proclaim good news. As Dean so beautifully set out last week, it takes careful discernment to see in what ways we best serve our

community in proclaiming that Good News – but nonetheless we are all, by virtue of our name of Christian, commissioned in baptism to re-present Christ to the world. Our life's task is one of living into that commission, into that ordained ministry conferred on us by water and spirit, confirmed in us by the heavenly food of bread and wine.

Marion Hatchett was responsible not only for the Book of Common Prayer, but also the Hymnal 1982 – which came out to scandalous reviews, excoriating “Father Hatchett” for eliminating old barn burners like Onward! Christian Soldiers, not to mention that old familiar page layout I grew up with when I would spend hours practicing the piano by going through all my mother's hymnal. Hatchett was a prolific writer, including the Commentary on the American Prayer Book, about which he writes, “A Christian is one for whom...the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a present reality, and one who has already entered the Kingdom, though it is not yet realized in its fullness.” The commentary takes every word of the Book of Common Prayer and either explains why we do it that way, and what the significance is behind the choices that were made in selecting the text bound together to form our corporate sign of worship, the way in which we recall into our lives each week our kingdom dwelling.

In a speech before the General Seminary last year, as he was honored as alumnus of the year, Hatchett wound up a survey of his own career, which in so many ways is intertwined with the shape of The Episcopal Church as we know it today, by proclaiming, “The American Church jumped way out ahead of the Church of England and other sister churches in a number of respects. One was in giving voice to priests and deacons and to laity (as well as to bishops and secular government officials) in the governance of the national church and of dioceses and of parishes. The American Church revised the Prayer Book in a way that went far beyond revisions necessitated by the new independence of the states. At its beginning the American Church legalized the use of hymnody along with metrical psalmody more than a generation before use of “hymns of human composure“ became legal in the Church of England. At an early stage the American Church gave recognition to critical biblical scholarship. The American Church eventually gave a place to women in various aspects of the life of the church including its ordained ministry. The American Church began to speak out against discrimination against those of same-sex orientation, and the American Church began to make moves in establishing full communion with other branches of Christendom.”

Marion J. Hatchett, Alumnus of the Year 2008, General Theological Seminary

One of the great ecumenical gifts he bequeathed to us is his service of chair of the ecumenical committee that researched and developed Eucharistic Prayer D, a prayer that reaches into the depths of Christian tradition to restore what was once the richest blessing over the mysticos feast, and a prayer that reaches out beyond the church to gain acceptance in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and all churches that use liturgical forms to celebrate the mystery of Christ's body and blood.

In these days when our mainline traditions are sinking from the weight of institutional slogging back and forth, when it may be challenging to think of reasons why we should bother to invite others to check out the Episcopal Church, I can think of no better reason to induce friends and family to experience who we are as a worshiping community of Christians – ones who have stepped into the Kingdom, and who recall into our present reality the moment when Jesus offered himself as bread of life and everlasting drink. A church that has for as long as this has been a nation been proudly doing what we're accused of doing by our traditionalist friends: namely looking for ways to enlarge the Body of Christ, to enlarge our own spiritual experience through the resources available to us in the world around us.

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians, writing as if he were the apostle Paul, warns us to make the most of the time because the days are evil. But in the same breath, our making most of the time is an invitation to soak our lungs – not with wine, as the ancient Greek drinking song would have it – but with the Spirit. “Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves – singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our neighbor in Moscow, Robin Biffle is a recent graduate of the Seminary of the South at Sewanee, where Marion Hatchett was in residence as liturgical scholar for many decades. As she shared with us her memories of taking classes with him in liturgics and hymnody. “However, my favorite memories are around a love for *Sacred Harp *singing which he and I shared. I'd drive his old red Volvo (Carolyn didn't want him to drive on the highway any more) to Henagar, Alabama, for singings there at Liberty Baptist Church--especially the two-day ones around the Fourth of July. He'd sit next to me in the trebles and give me a running commentary on almost every song. He didn't sing out loud, but looking at him, I knew his heart was singing. Oh, what a mind--not just for liturgy/hymnody in the Episcopal Church tradition(s), but much broader. On the way to the singing and on the way home, he talked and talked and talked. I don't know of anyone who loved learning and loved teaching more than he.”

The next time you hear the tune to Holy Manna, or you hear our gospel quartet singing “I went down to the river to pray,” think of the contributions of Marion Hatchett to that “new” hymnal that came out in 1982, that is already giving way to other hymnals and musical resources that fill our churches with the rich array of ways in which we get drunk on the music poured into our hearts by the spirit of God, the heavenly food and drink of Jesus Christ.