

Easter 5A

May 14, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 7:55-60 Stephen is martyred

1 Peter 2:2-10 We are living stones, a chosen race, a royal priesthood.

John 14:1-14 I am the way, truth, life.

“The fruit doesn’t fall far... from the tree.”

My father’s work ethic was extremely strong. At home he talked about work; on vacation he thought about work; every winter he worked on plans for the business when we got home. At work he wrote advertising, sold RVs, installed hitches, and mowed the lawn. An all inclusive job description. Hmm. The fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree.

I have kidded Ruth about signs of her growing up in her little hometown of Camden, NY; her pronunciation of reservoir as ‘reservoi’; sugar and water on baked bread; cutting a pie into all of its possible pieces.

The “fruit tree” for Stephen was not his biological heritage; but it was something that proved to be even stronger. There was an indwelling of spirit between himself and Jesus that led him to publically proclaim Jesus as Lord, and to very boldly accuse the Jewish leaders of their sin in not recognizing who Jesus was.

When Stephen had incited the crowd to the point that they pulled him into the street and started to stone him, he said, “Lord, receive my spirit,” and “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Do those words sound familiar? They are the same words that Jesus spoke from the cross. The fruit did not fall far from the tree.

Stephen was filled with the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ. Jesus talked about that depth of connection when he spoke from the Upper Room at the end of their Last Super together. He said “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” Later in John 14:20, Jesus says, “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

In our reading from 1 Peter today, Peter says that just as Jesus is a living stone, we too are living stones. And these living stones are the materials that when they are gathered together, make up a spiritual house, a royal priesthood. You and I together are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.

Jesus is offering you and me an eternal, everlasting, mutual indwelling with him. Just as Jesus and the Father are never separated, you and I are never separated from Jesus. Even though he is now Spirit, and we cannot see him, and some days we may not feel his presence, we have the promise of his constant indwelling. The fruit does not fall far from the tree. In the same way that my approach on work, and Ruth’s fondness for sugar glaze on top of baked bread show that we are like fruit

falling not far from the tree, we have that same ‘kinship’ with Jesus when we decide to live according to his values, and teachings, and love for God.

Our kinship with Jesus motivates the work we do on behalf of our preschool families; it defines our purpose for support of Chamberlains Children Home; it drives our hearts to find new meaningful ways to make other people’s lives better.

Jesus promised his disciples that the relationship he shares with them and with us will continue past his physical presence with us. He said, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places (mansions!).” He prepares a place for each of us, and he comes and brings us to him. He has promised that his relationship with us is on-going; it is forever.

These readings remind us who we are; at the core of our being; they remind us what motivates our ministry, and our caring about and for each other. This is beyond inheriting idiosyncrasies from our parents. This is a spiritual inheritance we carry – from our baptism. What passions make up YOUR spiritual inheritance?

We are already housed by God, fed by God, and carried by God. We already have a foot in the place Jesus prepared for us. We just need to look around; look within; and listen. Through our faith in Jesus and our commitment to abide in him, we are fruit that does not fall far from the tree; the tree that is the resurrected Son of God. Amen.