



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 17, 2008

2 Lent

The education system is very different where I grew up in England. When I was 11 I went to High school. It was an all boys school for the first year and it was very disciplined. We used to call the principal 'The Boss' and the Vice principal was about 5 feet 2 inches with shoulders about the same width and he was all muscle. He didn't walk. He strutted. His nickname was 'Booler'.

'Booler' used to carry a piece of an oak tree branch with him wherever he went. It was about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter and about 15 inches long. It was varnished and he carried it by putting it up his sleeve and resting it on his middle finger.

Whenever the bell used to ring for class we had to stand outside the class room to wait for the teacher and when they arrived they would let us into class. We had to line up outside the class in two neat rows. In our class there were 24 boys so we always had 2 rows of 12 boys. Once the bell had rung we were not allowed to speak until we sat in our seats in the class room and were given permission by the teacher.

The way the school was designed so that every so often a thin metal beam stuck out from the wall about 18 inches.

One day we were lined up outside our English class and just by the door was one of those beams. At the front of the line closest to the wall was a kid called Kenneth Franks. We called him Frankie. Frankie was a spindly kid, real smart, wore glasses and always carried a brief case which was unusual at our school to say the least.

Anyway as we stood in line waiting for our English teacher, somebody in the inside line, closest to the wall, pushed really hard and Frankie got pushed against the beam. His glasses went a bit wonky and he got a little smushed. He wasn't injured but he began to cry. Just then Mr. Quinn, 'Booler', came along and asked Frankie what was the matter. Frankie told him he had been pushed. Mr. Quinn asked the boy behind him did he push and the boy said no. So Mr. Quinn asked the boy behind him and he said no. So 'Booler' continued down the line. Everybody denied it and he came to the twelfth boy in the line which happened to be me. I was mortified as I also told him I did not push the line. Sir.

'Booler' then marched all 11 boys behind Frankie, the squashed, to his classroom. His class for that period was 16 and 17 year old seniors. 'Booler' lined us up in front of his class. He went down the line again and asked everybody in the line if they had pushed. Everybody denied it.

'Booler' then gave a simple command of hand out, released his oak stick, and he caned every one of us across the hand.

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To this day I do not know who pushed Frankie. To this day though I think that whoever did it was scared of Mr. Quinn. And to this day I believe that 11 hands could have been spared the cane, if someone had had the courage to tell the truth.

The picture of Mr. Quinn, Booter, is the picture that many people have of God. A god who wanders around looking for people doing naughty things so that he can punish them.

How far we have come from the truth on this.

Jesus showed us a God who is so different from the picture that people equate with a God like Mr. Quinn.

Jesus showed us a God who is ready to show mercy, not to punish. A God who is so ready to give a second chance, a new start, a new lease on life, instead of burdening us with guilt.

Jesus showed us a God of love, but he also showed us a God who asks that his children be truthful to him.

We always begin our service with a prayer that acknowledges God knows all the secrets of our hearts, so why is it we are scared to admit the truth about ourselves and tell the truth to God and Jesus?

This is not new because in the gospels we find a similar fear.

At the well of Samaria, the woman was trying to avoid the issue of her marital relationships. Jesus said, "You have had 5 husbands and the man you live with now is not your husband." I am sure that instead of the woman trying to skirt the issue, Jesus would have preferred her honesty rather than having to tell her the truth.

To the woman who sneaked up and touched the hem of his robe thinking Jesus would not notice, he asked, "Who touched my garment?" It was the disciples who found her but again I am sure that Jesus would have preferred her come straight to him.

People were scared and are still scared to come to Jesus, to come to God, with the truths about themselves.

Why is that?

Maybe we think that if God knows everything about us God will not like us any more. Maybe God will love us less.

Maybe we have been taught that God will punish us, abandon us, tell us to go away because he wants us no more. That we are now unworthy of his love.

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That is such a sad picture because there is no truth to that picture. And the more that picture is taught and portrayed the more fearful the children of God become.

All Jesus ever asks is our honesty with God. The truth will set you free said Jesus; the truth does set us free when we take the truth about ourselves to God. To our God who does not punish, does not condemn, but who is ready with merciful forgiveness to forgive and forgive and forgive and set us free from our fears.

Mr. Quinn, Booter, scared us kids to death. Mr. Quinn though is not, as some would have it, a picture of God. God wants us not to fear him, but to love him and be honest with him.

Amen

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