

16 Sunday B

July 18, 2021

St. Patrick

We hear today from the New Testament Letter to the Ephesian: **“For Christ Jesus is our peace; in his flesh he has...broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity, in place of two...”**

So many walls. That “dividing wall” in the time of the early church—it almost splintered it apart. And, Friends, there are so many walls today, within our church now and in our nation. Yes, so many walls, with the real danger of splitting us apart.

Two days ago a monument was dedicated one block from St. Patrick’s, at the corner of 4th Street and Beale Street. There stands a new statue of Ida B. Wells, who spoke out about “the dividing wall” that kept African-Americans as the lowest caste separated from whites. She was named “the princess of the press,” writing tirelessly about the horror of the recorded lynching of 4743 Blacks as a means of keeping them in place, at the bottom of the caste.

What compelled Ida B. Wells to speak out in 1892? About a mile from here near the corner of Walker and Mississippi Boulevard, three Black men opened a grocery store, called “People’s Grocery,” and it began to thrive. Across the street was a grocery store owned by whites. Some of their profits were being siphoned off by the growing business of the “People’s Grocery.” Tensions mounted, caused by the whites, and it resulted in the three Blacks put in jail. An angry mob gathered around the jail, forcing the release of the three Black men. And they lynched them.

It suffocated the lives of these three men, and it suffocated much of Black entrepreneurship for decades in Memphis.

“For Christ Jesus is our peace; in his flesh he has...broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

That wall in the early church was, on one side, Christians who had Jewish roots and conservatively held to all the Jewish precepts; on the other side of the wall were Gentiles with no background of the Jewish traditions. They believed in Jesus, and there was a deep antagonism between them and those Jewish-Christians. It almost ripped apart the early church’s unity.

“For Christ Jesus is our peace.”

Congressman John Lewis died a year ago *this* weekend of pancreatic cancer. That **“Christ Jesus is our peace”** was the heart of John Lewis’ faith throughout his life. So caught up in speaking about Jesus, as a boy growing up on a farm in Troy, Alabama, he preached to the chickens on their farm. Then, when he was 15, he heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the radio, talking about Jesus’ nonviolence and the struggle for his Beloved Community (1).

“The boy from Troy, as Dr. King called him, gave his whole life causing what he called “good trouble.” He kept breaking down those walls of bigotry and hatred. It cost him. In 1965, at the Edmund Pettus Bridge crossing Selma as the 25-year-old John Lewis led 600 protestors, a nightstick of a state trooper cracked his skull.

This is John Lewis’ final statement, issue right after he died a year ago: “In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence, is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.”

Ida B. Wells. Congressman John Lewis. They **“broke down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”** Indeed, they brought to life in their time that “Christ Jesus is our peace.” That Scripture from the New Testament letter shouts out to us *this* Sunday—in the midst of deep hostilities and immovable walls. We don’t have to preach to chickens. With Jesus as our peace, it’s truly our “turn to let freedom ring.”

(1) See “John Lewis,” in *Give Us This Day—July 2021* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), pg. 182, including the quotation of his after his death.

General Intercessions

July 18, 2021

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Heal your church, that we might be reconciled and truly made one in the blood of Christ; we pray to you, O Lord—

Break down the walls of hostility within our own nation, and truly make us a people “with liberty and justice for all”; we pray to you, O Lord--

Instill hope and strength to those tired in body or spirit, that they might find rest in you; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bring nations together to turn back the current climate crisis; we pray to you, O Lord—

Sustain those who suffer slander, broken relationships, or breach of trust; we pray to you, O Lord—

Raise to new life those who have died with their hope fixed on you, especially as we remember former parishioner Margaret Wade; we pray to you, O Lord—

