

Sermon for the Feast of the Transfiguration
August 6, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock
The Reverend Jeanne Finan

Batter My Heart ,Three Person'd God

The name for the test was unusual: Trinity.

When scientist Robert Oppenheimer was asked what inspired the name,
he could only say that for some reason what had come to mind
was a line from a John Donne poem:

Batter my heart, Three-Person'd God.

Batter my heart.

The Trinity Test was the first test of a nuclear weapon,
tested in a desert region of New Mexico in July of 1945.

The scientists who had been working on the project
really did not know if or exactly how such a bomb would work.

Betting pools were set up among the observers of the top secret test.

Predictions ranged from zero--a total dud—

to an explosion the force of 18 kilotons of TNT

to the destruction of the entire state of New Mexico

to the complete incineration of the planet,¹

*this fragile earth, our island home.*²

Even though no one could not predict the exact results,
they proceeded with the test.

How many times in the history of the world,
how many times in our own personal history,
do we forge ahead regardless of the consequences,
known or unknown?

On August 6, 1945,
an atomic bomb, named “Little Boy,”
was dropped on Hiroshima.

Two hundred thousand people were killed immediately;
60,000 more died from injuries and radiation poisoning
in the weeks that followed.

August 6th.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_test, *Trinity test*, Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia.

² Eucharistic Prayer C, Holy Eucharist II, *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 370.

The Feast of the Transfiguration is about a dazzling brightness.
It is a day we celebrate in our church year as a day of revelation.
A day when Jesus is undeniably revealed to his disciples
as bringing a new covenant,
just as Moses delivered the old covenant from God.
A day Jesus is undeniably revealed as prophet,
Standing right there, side-by-side, with Elijah.
A day when Jesus is revealed as being beyond
what the disciples could ask or imagine
or fully comprehend.
And we, like the disciples, still struggle to understand,
Who is this Jesus? Law giver? Prophet?
True Son of God?
All of the above? None of the above?

God tells Peter and James and John to stop.
To listen.
Listen to Jesus.
And they actually do.
They actually keep silent, stop their busy-ness,
and just take in that dazzling presence in their midst.
(At least for a few verses in this chapter of Luke's gospel!)

Batter my heart, three-person'd God...

The bombing of Hiroshima was about a dazzling brightness as well—
but one that brought unprecedented destruction and horror and terror.

I was not even born when Hiroshima was bombed.
But when I was in high school and was assigned to read John Hersey's book,
I remember asking my father, who was a career Army man,
my father, who survived the bombing at Pearl Harbor,
who fought in North Africa and Europe as WWII continued,
who was deployed again during the Korean Conflict...

I asked my father about Hiroshima:
Why did we have to do something so terrible, so extreme?
Why did we purposefully do something
that hurt and killed so many innocent people?

My father, who never termed war as anything but horrid, replied simply,
The Japanese would never have surrendered.

Many will tell you that is absolutely true.
Many will tell you that is absolutely not true.

The only truth is that we just don't know.

And that is so often the case.
We take and argue one side or the other.
But the reality is we just don't know.

Life is not like one of those pick-a-path children's books
where if you don't like one ending
you can just go back and read the pages in a different order
and come out at the end with a new ending.

There is no dress rehearsal when it comes to war, when it comes to death,
not even when it comes to life.
We need to always act with care and compassion and caution.
We don't get to rewind and try it again.

Many of you know that I have been in Panama the past 11 days
with a group of 15 young people and 4 other adults from around our Diocese.
The area where we go and live to do our mission work is very rural.
You go there and you are essentially disconnected from the larger world.
There is no radio, no television, no newspaper--
well, if there is a newspaper,
it is in Spanish and for some of us that is equal to no newspaper!
There is no one dropping by your office to talk about what is going on in the world.
No conversations after Morning Prayer
other than asking if the paint has arrived for the work project
and determining if we need more drop cloths.

So for 11 days I was completely disengaged with the world,
other than the world that was immediately in front of me.
And when I got back to the United States on Thursday night
I was overwhelmed by the news.
The horror going on
in what felt like every corner of the globe
was absolutely overpowering.
Having been isolated from the daily infusion of news for almost two weeks,
my initial reaction was,
Have we absolutely lost our minds?
What are we doing? What are we thinking?
And I don't mean just us as Americans.
I mean the entire globe.
We are dipping dangerously close to yet another August 6th.

In our baptismal covenant
we are called to renounce the forces of wickedness,
the evil powers of this world
which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.

Unfortunately we usually envision that wickedness, those evil powers,
as out there, over there, very distant and alien from our own lives.

Unfortunately, it is too often like those words
spoken by the old comic strip character Pogo:
We have met the enemy, and it is us.

The enemy is ALL of us.

The challenge is how do we put our whole trust in God's grace and love?
How does that look in our own daily lives?
How do we follow?
How do we obey?
How do we have a clue about what is really God's will?

Maybe we worry too much about the knowing,
about being right,
about receiving a personal revelation
on what God's will is for the world.

But that is not what we are taught to pray.
We are taught to pray, *God's will be done.*

We are not taught to pray,
*Give me the inside scoop on your will, God,
so I can be right, so I can understand everything going on,
so I can know precisely how to corner and capture the market
on only the good, the bright and the beautiful.*

It doesn't work that way.

Over and over again,
we are called to surrender to God.
That is what happens to the disciples on the mountain at the Transfiguration.
We are called to surrender to God,
not to control God.
And that is so difficult.

We need to remember August 6th.

The Transfiguration commemorates a day of revelation:

Revelation of all that is dark and destructive and horrid,
for Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus has foretold his death.
And that death will not be pretty.

But the Transfiguration is also a revelation of all that is good and bright and beautiful:
Jesus on the mountain, transfigured in a dazzling, bright way.
a symbolic preview of resurrection,
of God's healing and transforming—transfiguring—power.

Jesus went up on the mountain to pray.
Facing death, facing destruction and cruelty and evil,
Jesus turned
and returned to God.

Remember that John Donne poem?
Here is the line that follows the first:

*Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend...*

God seeks to mend
this broken and violent world.

We need to lift up and offer our own hearts first.