

Sermon on Carnival of Flowers Sunday and remembering Hildegard of Bingen.

17 September 2017

Robin Williams was one of the most fascinating and talented comedians, actors, deep thinkers, brave and courageous and damaged and amazing people who has been known (at least in part) by millions of people around our world. He was also an Anglican. I could say he still is an Anglican but as for whether there are denominations in heaven ... we will see.

Robin Williams produced a list of the top 10 reasons, according to him, of why he was an Episcopalian (an American Anglican).

10. No snake-handling.
9. You can believe in dinosaurs.
8. Male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.
7. You don't have to check your brains at the door.
6. Pew aerobics.
5. Church year is color-coded.
4. Free wine on Sunday.
3. All of the pageantry – none of the guilt.
2. You don't have to know how to swim to get baptized.
1. No matter what you believe, there's bound to be at least one other Anglican who agrees with you.

A great list! All of them give us some things to think about. One which really stands out to me is that, as Anglicans, we don't have to leave our brains at the door. Or our sense of humour. We are here, fully engaged, bringing all the other pieces of knowledge and experience that we have across life and integrating that in what we learn and experience here.

We are here engaging our brains. Part of what I do when I stand here at this point in our services is to encourage us to think, to use all our capacities. And we are here engaging all six senses. This is a full immersion experience in life.

When is the last time you looked at a flower? Here you just have to turn your head, or not even turn at all!! But when did you last look closely at a flower? Most flowers are amazingly intricate, complex things. All the parts that exist and come together to create what, in many cases, we see as a thing of beauty. When is the last time you stopped to smell the roses? Or the jasmine? Or any other kind of flower, even just to see if it actually had any scent!

And touch. Please don't touch the floral displays here today! If I incite you to do that I will be in BIG trouble with Denise and the others who have taken the individual blooms and created works of art. But outside of here, have you or do you ever touch flowers? Do you feel the textures and let your senses encounter the fragility as you cradle them in your hands or stroke with your fingertips.

This is a Carnival of Flowers! Are you engaging all of your senses or are you just looking? Sight, smell, touch ...

I am not quite sure where to go with the sense of hearing when it comes to flowers., And as for taste I think there are certain flowers which are edible but once again please don't go chomping the displays in the church!

Employing all our senses there are plenty of other delights for us to taste which will be appearing in those tents outside. Eating and drinking can also be celebration. And we have been delighted here in many ways with food for our ears, and there is more to come!

Are there some barriers that we set up where we think we are doing spiritual things at some times and THEN we step into a world of other senses and connections? Do we step outside into a festival, or listen to certain types of music, or get into a pattern of a working week and we feel like we are stepping out of a Godly connection into a secular one?

The mystics, and Hildegard of Bingen is among them, sense the seamless weave of connections which are all around us. There is no point at which we stop being spiritual beings engaged in a divine dance with God. There is no point at which we are disengaged or distanced or disconnected from God. We only think we are.

There is no point at which we are hidden from God. It is only that at some times we have the impression that we are, or it seems that God is hidden from us. Or perhaps those are times when we might be trying to hide. There are no places where God is not.

Some of the mystics and their modern interpreters, like Matthew Fox (the Roman Catholic priest theologian who is now also an Episcopalian Anglican) are accused of being pantheists. A Pantheist is someone who may claim that everything that exists is God. That is not what the mystic actually believed. Instead it is about being aware, seeing, recognising, celebrating the connection and presence of God in this world around us. As it was put by Hildegard in the quote which I included at the beginning of this service “All of creation is a song of praise to God.” Do you hear the song? Do you recognise that voice speaking, singing to us from God, about God, celebrating God?

When we do hear that song, when we are aware ... where does it take us?

Last night, as some of us were debriefing after the second day of the Carnival, we each shared what we were thankful for. An attitude of gratitude takes us deeper into awareness. An attitude in which we are open to see and listen helps us to appreciate even more deeply that love which is in the heart of God.

Notice that in that much-loved verse in our reading today from John’s gospel, John 3:16, John didn’t say “God loved the people in the world so much that He sent His Son.” Instead “God loved the world so much that He sent His Son.” The love of God is imprinted in all that is around us. Hildegard saw that. She adopted an attitude of thankfulness, awareness, harmony, blessing, and deep humility in the face of the presence of God tangible in the world around us.

We are here, immersed this day, in love. Love made tangible for us in the richness of this world and God’s amazing blessings. That sounds to me like a good reason to be an Anglican and a good reason to celebrate being here.

Amen.

Paul Mitchell