

Sharing Our Own Selves I Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46; Psalm 1 10-23-2011

On Friday, a cool, autumn afternoon, as I stood at the side of 183 with members of the Wilber family, I wondered what I could do or say that might help them in a time of loss and grief. I saw the quiet competence of the EMTs and the state police and our first selectman guiding traffic around the maze of vehicles on the side of the road. I saw the faces of some of you keeping a respectful distance and others offering comforting embraces. I saw members of the town crew just being there to offer any support possible.

I knew, as I always do, that during a tragic event, there is really nothing anyone can say or do. Words fail us, as do our actions, when people are suffering disbelief or even shock, when something unexpected and unsettling occurs. But, during these times I always see the ties that bind us together as humans—ties of love, concern and support.

This morning's scripture reading from I Thessalonians awakened my soul and mind and heart to the way we support one another in times of despair and trouble by simply sharing our own selves. Often this gift, this sacrifice, of just being present, is what helps people make sense of life when they feel there is no sense in it at all.

Paul told those who read this letter in the past and who still heed its words in the present, that he and those who were with him, had no other agenda than to share themselves. It was important that the little church they visited in Thessalonica understood this and knew that there were no ulterior motives in their visit. By sharing the gospel and themselves, they hoped to strengthen that little group of believers so that they could stand on their own when Paul would leave them.

The sharing of our own selves is grounded in the words we read from the Gospel of Matthew—those precious words that cut through all 614 laws the nation Israel was bound to follow. Those words that focus on the two greatest commandments—to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and our neighbors as our selves.

Those words were spoken as Jesus answered questions put to him by those who were his enemies. Once again they sought to trap him with a series of queries. But when they heard his answers to their questions, they left daring to ask no others. They knew the time was not right.

Their grievance with him was in believing that he was going to upset their applecart of life. He was changing the view people had of their faith—one tied to many laws that would keep everyone in control. He called for a way out of their legalistic approach to their faith, to one based on the elements of love for God and for one another.

Often, when we are called to love one another, there is no book of hard and fast rules to follow. Instead, we are asked to discover the light of love that should be present within our beings as followers of Christ. It is to become second nature to us to reach out helping hands and become a caring presence for those around us. That is what many here do in times of great distress. The very best of human nature arises and many help carry the burdens of a few.

That is what makes us a “church” and that is what makes us a “community.” We set aside any lines that have been drawn between us and come together to offer our very own selves to carry others along until they are able to find their own strength again.

This is what is meant when it is said that Jesus came to urge us into becoming the very best humans we can become and sharing

this gift with others. We see this emphasis throughout the words and work of the gospels, when he would stop in the midst of his travels to offer a helping and healing hand to someone suffering or in pain. His ministry was a ministry of interruption—there was always someone in need that he could not just dismiss and hurry past. He had to stop and set aside any agenda or plan he might have for the day and share himself.

As his followers, we are to do the same. We are to share bits and pieces of ourselves when we discover others deep in suffering. We are to reveal the great love we should have for our God and our neighbors in our actions and our words. We are to have the strength to share our own selves with people, knowing that this valuable resource we have within us is always renewable and strengthened—there is always plenty to go around. It has always been a beautiful thing to see our little town come together in many different ways to support those who live here. The ability to give of our selves is one of the greatest miracles that we all can work.

Amen