
All Saints' 2008

The Messenger

of St James' Church, Texarkana, Texas

Six Feet Under

By the Rev'd Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC

I wonder how many of you have seen the television program *Six Feet Under*? This program, which appeared on HBO some years ago, is an extraordinary look into the question of death in our culture. It centers around a family who have been operating a family-style funeral home in Los Angeles for many years. The father was killed in a freak accident himself, and his two sons, one who had been in the business with him and one who had not, take over the operation of the home, assisted by their mother who keeps house for their much younger sister. The two sons are in fact much like the two sons in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, for one has stayed at home dutifully and is now resentful, and the other has become very much a prodigal.

The aspect which is interesting for our purposes is that each episode begins with the death of a person. It is sometimes violent, sometimes accidental, sometimes even grimly humorous. The next hour explores the effect this death has on all concerned, including those staff of the funeral home. In addition to bring very will written, we are shown the full panoply of reactions of people in popular American culture to death itself. Some flee from its reality and want no part in the funeral. Some try to pretend that the person is somehow not rally dead and ensure that the corpse is as lifelike as possible. Some feel angry and resentful that their loved one has died; others rejoice openly. It is an astonishing and vivid picture.

The Clergy are familiar with much of this, and we occasionally find strange attitudes indeed on the part of those who survive.

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS @ ST JAMES'

*** CHANGE IN TIME,
effective October 26th ***

Mass at 5:30pm
Supper at 6:00pm
Adult Class & Faithweavers
6:30pm to 7:30pm

In the adult class:

"But I Object!: Controversial Questions"

Topics to be discussed include:

Is Jesus the only way to God?

Why do I suffer?

Is there a Christian Sexual Ethic?

Can Christians believe in evolution?

Denial, anger, feelings of loss, confusion about the fate of a deceased Christian, all these join together to form a jigsaw puzzle of conflicting emotions. Often, secular comforts are advanced or sought: "It is better this way; he is out of his pain." Or, "She would have wanted to go," and so on. Even stranger, sometimes seemingly Christian but actually pagan ideas are embraced: of a child's death and even sometimes an adult, it is sometimes suggested that the person is now an angel (*It's a Wonderful Life*). It is often suggested, against scriptural evidence, that the deceased has immediately been admitted to heaven, or that we can be certain that this is so. Oddest of all is the assertion that Christians are somehow subject to the teachings of other religions, most commonly reincarnation, which is directly

contrary to our Lord's teaching on the individuality of the person, and the inextricable connection between one body and one soul.

Such strange contradictions are very closely connected to the Christian paradox about death itself. In mediaeval days, this contradiction was between two poles of Christian thought and feeling. The first was that we naturally, even as Christians, fear death. We hope that it will be as long delayed as possible, and we pray for a long and happy life. We pray to avoid sickness and catastrophe, accident and loss of our faculties. This was even more accentuated in mediaeval times when infant mortality, death by battle or violence, and above all, the plague were constantly feared. This points to a very human truth: although as Christians we know that death is not final, we still fear it, and mourn the deaths of those we love. This is a fact of life, and cannot be ignored or despised. As The Queen said of the September 11th, 2001 deaths, Grief is quite simply the price we pay for loving others. The funeral services of the Church recognize this, and accept that even Christians who believe, hope, trust and know the promise of our Lord's resurrection to all of us, have fear and grief surrounding the process of life and death. It has ever been thus.

The other side of the coin is that as Christians we do not mourn as those who have no hope. We realize that since we have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, we share also in his victory over death. "Death hath no more dominion over us," is our cry. It is in this sense that St Francis of Assisi was able to call death his "friend" in the Canticle of the Sun. How many of us really would feel able to do that in all frankness? Yet as Christians that is precisely what we ought to do.

The grave is the bed of hope, and the gate of death leads for Christians to Eternal Life. The promise of Easter, which is of course also the promise of our baptism, is that death in this life is but the prelude to the next life: being prepared to meet God, and finally sharing in his eternal and heavenly banquet, of which the Mass on Earth is but a pale replica. In this sense we can say that death is the Great Adventure. Perhaps some of us do feel adventurous and say when the time comes,

"Bring it on!" Most of us will have known both feelings from time to time.

The important point is that the Christian facing death, as we all must, has before him the example of our Lord's death and resurrection and the certain knowledge that it brings, he has the Sacraments of the Church to fortify him: Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Penance and final Unction. He has also the teaching of the Gospel. He has the prayers of our Lady and all the saints to guard and guide him. He has finally the prayers of the Church after he has died, recommending him in love to God, the Loving Father, who has made all things.

Father Swain is the Rector of the Church of the Resurrection, New York City, and Superior General of the Guild of All Souls.

THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER is traditionally dedicated to the Faithful Departed and the Holy Souls in Paradise.

From the *Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer*:

Q. Why do we pray for the dead?

A. We pray for them, because we still hold them in our love, and because we hope and trust that in God's presence that those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is.

Q. What, then, is our assurance as Christians?

A. Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Father of all, we pray to those we love, but see no longer: Grant them your peace; let light perpetual shine upon them; and, in your loving wisdom and almighty power, work in them the good purpose of your perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(BCP, p. 504)

Christian Education Outreach Project for October...

Collecting pet food and supplies for the Texarkana Animal Shelter in honor of St. Francis of Assisi

Sunday @ 9:00 am**Keys to the Kingdom, Grades K/4 - 5**

October: David, the Boy

November: David, the King

Living the Good News - Grades 6 - 8

Teachers: Carter Adams & John Stanley

Living the Good News - Grades 9 - 12

Teachers: Michelle Shores & Megan Schroeder

10:00 am

Children's Liturgy of the Word - K/4 and up

Leaders for October - Don & Melissa McCoy

Leader for November - Carter Adams

Wednesday Nights**Faithweavers - Grades K/4 -5**

Teachers: Susie Stanley & Donna McGee

PLEASE HELP OUR CHILDREN BY:

- ❖ Teaching/assisting a 4 week workshop for Keys to the Kingdom Rotation
- ❖ Leading/assisting in children's Liturgy of the Word for a month
- ❖ Assisting in Faithweavers for a month
- ❖ Providing snacks/meals for Jr. or Sr. EYC once a month
- ❖ Assisting the leaders in Jr. or Sr. EYC for a month
- ❖ Assisting with Jr. or Sr. EYC on special events or trips
- ❖ Speaking to youth about volunteer opportunities

Contact Mary Nell Short, maryn@stjamestxk.org or Jennifer Gould, jenniferg@stjamestxk.org for details.

It's hard to believe that we are already more than a month into the school year! I know EYC had a slow start, but I am back and excited about the rest of the year! We have some great things planned with lessons, fun outings and service projects.

We have changed things a little by having all EYC meetings on Sunday nights. Hopefully, we will have more youth members attend since there are fewer school activities on Sundays. Chuck Firmin and Lisa McDermott will continue to sponsor the Junior High

group for this year. (Next year, I will need some new faces, so let me know if you would be interested!!!) Stephanie Fullerton and I will lead the Senior High group. We hope to hand some of the planning over to the youth members so they can have ownership of the program and we will talk about and do things that align with their interests. My requests are that we try to do certain activities each month, such as a service project, a fun activity and a more traditional bible study. We look forward to Operation Christmas Child in November as a

service project and our fun activity for December will be a second annual progressive dinner (if anyone is interested in hosting or cooking for our group, please contact me.)

On top of our EYC meetings on Sundays, I continue to lead a group on Wednesday nights (7-8 PM) for grades 6-12 and we are currently diving in to the Book of Job. This is a great book to help with questions like “why is there suffering” or “Why do bad things happen to good people?” These are

questions that I believe challenge all of us at some point in our spiritual lives. Hopefully, this will give our young people somewhere to turn when those questions and concerns surface.

So far, we have had a fun year and brought up some very important questions both on Wednesdays and Sundays. We have so much more in store for this year! Thanks so much to everyone who has been so supportive of the youth program and me. Your actions share Christ’s love with the world.

Junior and Senior High EYC Schedules

(Regular meetings: Sundays 6 PM to 7:30/8 PM)

Sunday, Oct. 19	Bowling at Holiday Bowl at 6 PM
Friday, Oct. 24	Corn Maze and Field of Screams – meet at the church at 5 PM
Sunday, Oct. 26	Regular EYC meetings
Sunday, Nov. 2	Regular EYC meetings
Sunday, Nov. 9	We will go shopping for “Operation Christmas Child” stuff
Fri.-Sun. Nov 14-16	Happening for Grades 10-12
Sunday, Nov. 16	Jr EYC meeting ONLY
Wednesday, Nov. 19	OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD
Nov. 22-30	No EYC due to THANKSGIVING!!
Sunday, Dec. 7	Regular EYC meetings
Sunday, Dec. 14	PROGRESSIVE DINNER

Sunday, November 2nd is

All Saints’ Sunday

Fajitas and Margaritas to follow the 10am Mass.