

Sermon: September 27, 2009

“Derrion & Roseland”

Reading the paper this week ... just have to weep.

Derrion Albert ... age 16 ... on his way home from school ... beaten to death in a mob of ugly violence.

Roseland has become one of the most violent parts of our city.

KIDS DESERVE TO BE SAFE.

ALL OF US DO.

Even here ... in a place that really doesn't “know” much violence.

You are a 7th grader. You come to confirmation class for the first time ... maybe your parents get you to come to a youth-event for the first time. You walk in the door ... see a bunch of kids you don't know ... they all seem to know each other ... and you just want to crawl into a hole or go home!!

Then someone comes up to you ... introduces herself ... welcomes you ... and, in a moment of time, you feel safe, welcome, and a part of the community.

Derrion couldn't even walk home from school the other day.

Two cousins ... Tyrone and Percy ... they couldn't even visit on their porch at 9:30 Saturday night.

It's easy to glamorize the past. I've done it in front of you so many times.

And, you know? ... sometimes we “glamorize” the past to cover-up our own pain.

I've been thinking ...

My grandparents spent most of their lives in Roseland. Roseland was, for them and for us, a good place ... a “rich place” ... a playground of love ... “an oasis of joy” ...

Day-after-day on the school playground ... using a stick for a bat ... putting the strike-zone on the brick wall.

You could leave your ball on the ground, and it would be there the next day.

Their front porch ----- a festive and loving gathering place. The ball game on the radio ... my grandpa in his plaid shorts and sleeve-less t-shirt barely covering his beer-belly.

I remember going to school years ago. Oh, sure ----- we had the jocks and the greasers ... the choir people and theater people ... the kool-kids and the not-so-kool ... but violence on the way home????? -----

not in the mix!! Our neighborhood park was a place of refuge. You would leave for the park on your bike at 8:00 am ... and your parents didn't want to see you before supper.

SO MUCH HAS CHANGED.

Roseland is at war.

Kiddie-land closes today. Great America is ridiculously expensive.

You gotta escort your kid to the park and stay there to watch him.

Nobody thinks twice today when a fight breaks out in the school hallway.

What hasn't changed is our need to be SAFE.

We need to have spaces and places where we are truly free to be who we are.

Catholics and Lutherans and Baptists.

People battling everything from mental illness to cancer.

Republicans and Democrats and Independents.

People of color ... Swedes and Italians ... a few Irish mixed in.

Long time church-goers, and those who haven't darkened the door of a church for 20 years.

Single, divorced, married ... the gay and the straight.

People with walkers and kids who haven't learned to walk yet.

Those who take Communion and those who don't.

The who are rock-sure of their faith ... and those who doubt almost everything.

Yes, we need a place. A church. An altar. An oasis. Where we can all come together and spiritually ----

BE SET FREE!!

A lot of the lessons of late have been about Jesus curing people and casting-out demons.

How many times in your life????

One of your kids is battling an addiction ... you have cancer ... you're facing major surgery ...
and you desperately WANT A CURE!! ... you want it all to be ok.

Well ... we, for the most part, don't get the "cure" we want ...but ----- even when there is no cure ...
we can be healed.

Healing is an inside job. Healing gives us strength ... when a cure isn't going to happen.

Healings bring perspective and a kind-of spiritual fortitude.

Healing *casts out those demons* ... too often getting in the way of us accepting our own humanity.

HEALING is what happens when we receive the bread and wine ... and then go back to our seats ... and we
realize ----- *it will never be the same, but it will be ok.*

I'm at Christ Hospital ... getting ready to leave the psychiatric unit. After you visit someone there ... one of the
nurses has to let you out. As I'm ready to leave ... I'm standing next to a very stately-well-dressed African
American Catholic priest. He is in "full-garb"!@!! Not just a clerical collar ... but a black vest, polished shoes,
and slacks without a wrinkle I mean: he looks good!!

And me? ... I look my "usual self" ----- nice blue jeans ... Kean-sandals ... and an "all about
love All Saints" t-shirt. The nurse looks at me ... then looks at the priest:

"Hey, Reverend he looks a hell-of-a-lot better than you do!@!!"

(So much for my self-esteem.)

As we leave, the priest and I both laugh.

I begin speaking ... "I know you. You are Father George Clements. I remember how you adopted those
young men years ago how are they doing now? ... and what are you doing????"

He talks to me about how they've grown-up ... some married ... he now has grand-kids ...

*He asks about my family. I tell him about Jude's and my grown kids ... then share the story of Quinton
coming into our lives. I share with him my story about my neighbor ----- who is so prejudiced
when it comes to people of color ... but ... at his funeral ... Q and my wife and I were in the front row ...
and a priest from Kenya celebrated the mass. He laughs ... I laugh.*

Father Clements is retired ... 77 years old ... still works with addicts and prisoners.

As we leave ... he hands me his card.

I didn't look at it until I got into my truck. It says:

ONE CHURCH

ONE CHILD

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT: Father George Clements

This is our church ... keeping kids safe ----- one child at a time.

Sure ... we have all kinds of buildings ... we can argue about the colors in our kitchen ... we make rules, and
we preach like we know it all.

But in this "one church" there is only one criteria for membership:

to walk in the sandals of a humble carpenter.

We may not get our way ... but we can be HEALED. HEALING ----- God's gift to us ...
our gift to each other ... "one child at a time."

Don Borling All Saints Lutheran Church
13350 LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL 60462
September 27, 2009

