

July 5, 2009
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
Pentecost V
The Rev. Canon Catherine Nichols

Too Darn Hot!

I must make a confession.

I'm in the midst of a binge.

I've been listening to the great jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald.

And not just Ella singing in her fabulous smoky voice,

but Ella Fitzgerald singing songs

by consummate wordsmith Cole Porter.

So I'll open with one of Porter's best:

"It's Too Darn Hot!"

Porter writes "I want to sup with my baby tonight,

Refill the cup with my baby tonight...

But it's too darn Hot!"

Yesterday at 5 in the afternoon

-- it must have been over 90 degrees --

we had a wedding in this cathedral.

And it was Very Hot.

Well, we have church when it's hot and when it's cold:

We did not close our doors last December

when it snowed and Portland was paralyzed.

And we're open today when it's extreme summer, suddenly.

It is, indeed, too darn hot!

Yet here we are, just where we ought to be of a Sunday morning,
worshiping God.

So let's keep this VERY, VERY short.

First, some brief comments about the strange section
of Paul's Second Letter to the People of Corinth:

*I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago
was caught up to the third heaven....*

The third heaven --- what could he mean?

Scholars helped me with that: Paul is referring
to his astounding experience on his way
to persecute the Christians in Damascus.

I know a person... we often speak of ourselves as someone other
when writing or preaching to retain some anonymity.

Paul's dramatic conversion when Christ Jesus
encounters and strikes him down on that road to Damascus...,
Paul has difficulty explaining that visionary experience.

Well, who wouldn't?!

Then Paul mentions *the thorn in the flesh* which haunts him.

Some scholars suspect that Paul had epilepsy.

(Studies show that visions often accompany epileptic experiences,

that the visions many of our saints experienced

could well have accompanied actual seizures.)

Other scholars suggest that he had a speech impediment.

Well, who want to preach and teach

hampered by delivery problems???

Others are convinced that he struggled with homosexuality.

We cannot know.

But Paul's point is that as prophets or as witnesses to Christ

it is the very weaknesses and hardships which we experience

that strengthen us.

If we're honest we all have experienced thorns in the flesh:

loss, severe illness, failure, lack of confidence.

We don't live without deep scratches from life's thorns.

And as our scars heal we have two choices:

we can give in, -- stew in our unhappy juice, --

or we can grow, mature, become stronger,
therefore better able to serve God through serving others.

Today's gospel story offers us two particular themes:

first: local prophets aren't taken seriously,
and second, if a job we're to do can't be done in a particular place
we're to move on, shake the dust from our sandals, and begin again.

It's too darn hot to go into depth this morning.

So here's what I invite you to think on this week:

a prophet without honor:

who are the people in your life, everyday people,

who have enormously surprised you

when you have discovered their talent, their wisdom, their fame?

When you were young was there a kid down the street

who seemed most unpromising:

She could hardly read, even by the upper grades of elementary school.

She was painfully shy.

She stumbled through high school, seeming to have no direction in life,

none whatsoever.

Have you had the humbling experience of years later,

reading the Journal of The American Medical Association,
and coming upon a dynamite article by that very kid,
now grown,
a remarkable article showing some scientific breakthrough
with the biography describing her as an eminent biologist
who has written hundreds of papers and who now travels the world
giving lectures to other scientists?!

Were you surprised by the unrecognized scholar
you'd never have guessed she had in her?

Who are some of the people among you
whom you would never have expected to Be Something?

And now they are shocking and delighting you
with who they have become!

I also invite you this week to remember an experience
when you discovered that you couldn't accomplish
what you thought you would,
and you moved on.

You moved on!

You didn't wallow in failure.

You shook that dust off your feet, and you continued forward.
My bishop in Vermont liked to talk about her theology of failure:

“God expects us to fail so that we can LEARN,
learn what we can do better,
and then move on to deeper maturity,
perhaps even success.”

It’s too darn hot!

Just the weather to sip a cold drink and listen to Ella,

“I’d like to sup with my baby tonight,
Refill the cup with my baby tonight....”

So refill the cup with something iced and refreshing,
and think about prophets without honor in their home town.

And think about disciples

--- your friends or family or acquaintances, or YOU ---
who have moved on to new successes after they’ve failed.

Think about them. It will help you COOL DOWN.