

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
August 8, 2010

The Very Rev. Bill Lupfer

..... I want to thank you again for your graciousness to allow me to do that. The sabbatical had many pieces and on the last Sunday of this month I'll tell you many more stories, but one part of the sabbatical was going to Tibet. Now we have many people in this congregation who've been to Tibet, so I talked to one of them and the first question he asked me when I said "Hey, I want to talk to you about Tibet, because we're going there." He said "What part of Tibet? Bill, you do know that Tibet is as big as Western Europe, don't you?" No, that's why I need to talk to you. So we chose to -- OK, so here's Tibet, well we went to about 2:00 o'clock -- OK -- Northeast, Amdo Province. It's a place that's sort of where China, Tibet, and Mongolia mix; China's very clear that it's China of course, and we all know that, but traditional Tibetan boundary right there. The current Dali Lama was discovered nearby. One of the places we went to was Repcon, which is the sort of iconographical center of Tibet where the artists all are that paint the beautiful thangkas, the representations of the spiritual powers of Tibet as they understand them. While we were there we heard that the local reincarnated Lama was going to be out in the grasslands visiting some of the nomads nearby -- nearby meant an hour and a half on a little windy road; so we went, it was incredible. About six thousand nomads gathered around a little monastery. They all put their tents up and stayed four or five days. We went two days. But let me tell you, it was a very reverent time, but it was also one heck of a party. And we enjoyed both of those. We did meet the Ripcache; we got in line with four thousand other people and I couldn't believe how fast the line went. We were almost running and then I realized that's the Ripcache sorta slapped you on the head as you ran by, so we didn't pause for conversation. I mean when you are the living reincarnation of the four protectors of Tibet, the four Directional protectors of Tibet, I guess you don't have to engage all four thousand in conversation. You did do a little bit of a -- looked at me like who's this crazy person going by. Then we settled into the picnic. Just imagine a big huge grassland as far as the eye could see with six thousand of your favorite people picnicking -- that's what it was -- lot of sort of spread out, but a wonderful, wonderful feeling of community and connection. So we went back that night to our hotel and came back the next day; we were actually driving through and

stopped. It was even more crowded – traffic jam. The Ripcache was dressed in full liturgical splendor giving a teaching, pouring holy water and the drama and the devotion were frankly amazing. Just wonderful to just walk through and breathe in; to watch all those folks anchored into the ancient values that have guided them for millennia, to watch them gather and make that real again, to find common ground out on the grasslands was just an incredible gift for us, not to mention all the conversations and encounters and smiles and pictures and all that. You know how it is when you go far away and you think you see something really unique and special and then you come home and you see it right at home. Isn't that kinda sometimes the reason we travel? So I came back here last Sunday and found a contemporary community gathering around ancient values, Christian values, here at Trinity Cathedral surrounded by family and friends, with full Episcopal spread in the pews, right, we don't wanna get too close – just like the Tibetan families were in the grasslands, close, but not too close around this common ground that is our one hundred and sixty years of worship here at Trinity Cathedral. It's so fun to see you all as Tibetans out in the grasslands and to imagine them as Episcopalians and to share this common hope and common faith together and to see the power that that brings. Now when I was hit by all this was in the opening hymn, right, that opening hymn that we begin with orientates us into worship and so it was again this morning. The opening hymn in a sense tells all of us that we will stand, we will focus together and we will breathe at the same time. That's one of the reasons I love singing hymns. And probably the most powerful experience I've had of that one breath in hymn singing was when Michael Klienschmidt, our new Canon for Cathedral music was here in the discernment time when we were asking God who would it be? And Michael and his husband Mark were asking God: "maybe we're called somewhere, let's open our hearts" -- so Michael came to be with us and part of the discernment was to invite Michael up to the organ bench when two hundred of us who had gathered for the concert that he played, joined him with our hymnals to sing a hymn. So Michael did some improvisation –however you say that word – and then he through the music communicated to us that it was time to sing. Right then everyone took a huge breath together; we're packed up here – a huge breath together and sang with gusto. Music orders our common life and helps us breath together as the Body of Christ and also focuses the attention of our mind on the words that we sing. It's an incredibly intimate time. Music spans all cultures so you may look at another culture and see them chanting together to come together. Imagine that you all chant together every Sunday morning, because

you sing four to six hymns together –call them chants. You order your breath and I am so grateful that Michael is here to help us order our breath to breathe together, to sing and make beautiful music and remind ourselves that we are stronger together than we are alone; that’s part of our shared value. I was thrilled as I began to prepare this sermon this morning to read the first sentence in the gospel because it’s one of my favorites “Fear not little flock for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” – to give you the Kingdom – it’s already there. This section in Luke where we find one of my favorite verses is a whole chapter or two on watchfulness, how to be watchful and waiting without being up tight and nervous. It’s not easy. So Jesus gives us a lot of words. And then there’s a lot of books on the subject too. One of my favorite books is by a guy named Garret Keizer – Catherine’s helping me with the pronunciation of his last name – Garret Keizer -- about lay ministry -- and Garret is a priest in the North of Vermont and New Hampshire in the quiet country out there. One of his things as a lay leader he had to be part of the leadership of worship so every time at the end of worship at the back before they started he thought to himself “Fear not little flock for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” and he marched down the aisle hopefully with proper ordered breathing and hymn singing and began the service. One of the questions Garret Keizer asks in that book “The Dresser of Sycamore Trees” is this; it’s an important question I think “Are you the type of person who will live your life so that you’re on the record as ‘right’ or are you the type of person who will live your life so as to invite others into righteousness?” “Will you live so that you are on the record as ‘right’ or live so as to invite others into righteousness? And I think we’ve all been that school kid raising their hand – “me, me I know the answer!” “Let me show you by saying it quickly, and impress you with my intelligence”. But there’s a deeper spiritual maturity that is not so concerned to put ourselves out first to prove how smart we are, but is willing to maybe step back a little bit, enter the mess of community and encourage others. Now in Tibetan Buddhism that’s called taking the Bodesuk ihisstva, in Buddhism the Bodihisstva is that spiritual person who’s really come to the fullness of joy and yet rather than enter that joy and leave everyone else behind the person takes a vow to pause at that threshold and turn towards their brothers and sisters inviting all of them in too and doing whatever it requires of them to bring their brothers and sisters along. Maybe the Christian vow is “Where do you say yes?” Will you live your life so that you’re on the record as *right* or will you live your life so as to invite others into righteousness? Some of the reflections I’ve had on sabbatical are about Trinity as a whole, who we are as

a whole and do the wonderful glorious parts of Trinity add up to more than the parts – Is the whole more than the parts? How does that work for us? How do we build common ground? In Hebrews, I think, in the part on Genesis and Abraham is considered faithful because he builds that common ground. Abraham stops, he had it made already, but he stopped and took a journey so all those could come along with him into the fullness of faith. In fact our scripture today is defining faith as that inclination to reach out so others can grow into righteousness and we don't have to show off ourselves so much, to dim our own lives so others can grow more – not to know better than they do, but to ask the question with them, to seek that common ground and common inheritance that we have. I think there's no liturgy more powerful for that to remind us than baptism, reminding us that we are all in this together. No one has a lock on the right answer. And the only way we discover it is in public together, as we come into common worship. In a few minutes you will take a vow; you will take that vow to live your life in such a way that you help others grow into righteousness. Three young children to be baptized today and you will take that vow to step back from your own self-fulfillment and welcome others along with you, to see that your own self spiritual maturity is tied up with reaching out to your brothers and sisters. And so enjoy this baptism that is coming upon us and notice, watch, be wakeful for the vow that you shall take in a few minutes.