

Ash Wednesday
Isaiah 58:1-12

2011
Psalm 103

2 Cor 5:20b – 6:10 Mt. 6:1-6, 16-21

Recently in the news there has been a story about nine boys, aged 7 to 13 years old, killed mistakenly in an attack by coalition forces in Kunar province in northeast Afghanistan. Some of the boys were brothers. They were out gathering firewood and were mistaken for rebel forces; they were gunned down from helicopters.

No one can dispute that this was a tragedy – for the boys and for their families. It's also a tragedy for the gunners and others on board those helicopters. They are someone's boys, too, and when they come home from war they may suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and nightmares, especially when they look at their own little boys. And so it goes, generation after generation.

In the face of such brokenness and loss, we may feel helpless. I was unable to sleep the night I heard this story on the news. I sat in the chair where I usually sit to say my prayers and held my globe of the world. I put my hands over the part of the map at which Afghanistan is located and I prayed and cried and rocked the world in my arms.

In the face of such brokenness and loss, the deeper questions of our lives take on a greater urgency.

1. What is God calling you/us to do?
2. Who is God calling you/us to be?
3. What is the purpose of your/our life?

Let me suggest a Lenten "fast" that may open you to hearing the answers to these questions.

First, FAST from avoiding these questions.

FAST from blaming other for _____ (you fill in the blank).

FAST from trying to change others; focus on yourself.

FAST from negative thinking.

FAST from overworking.

FAST from thinking you have all the answers; put things in God's hands.

Instead, FEAST on Scripture and holy reading.

FEAST on doing good in God's name.

FEAST on positive thinking and on trusting in the action of Christ's Spirit.

FEAST on the love of God in Word and Sacrament.

FEAST on rest and re-creation.

If the whole world lived by these simple ideals, there would be no more stories like the one about those young boys. In the words of theologian and author Henri Nouwen, "Just imagine all the people on this planet holding hands and forming one large circle of love. We say, 'I can't imagine.' But God says, 'That's what I imagine, a whole world...living in my image.'"

What a wonderful world it would be.