

A few years back I was asked to speak at the Holocaust observance at the College of St. Elizabeth as they marked the anniversary of the opening of the concentration camps in Europe. They had asked that I address "*The Church and the Holocaust*," and I need to tell you I don't think I was ever so nervous as I was then. I'm normally a little anxious on any Sunday I am preaching, but that day was especially stressful because of the church's complicity in the *Shoah*, the holocaust. Lutherans and Romans in particular bear a special guilt because of what we did, and what we didn't do. And as I have written and taught these last two decades on the complicity of the church, it is a topic than many aren't anxious to hear. My anxiety was raised even more as that St. Elizabeth date drew closer, when my colleague at the College called to tell me the "good news" that there would be survivors of the camps present. And when the day finally arrived, my anxiety spiked as I was told that the first two rows across the whole auditorium were filled with survivors, with their families occupying several rows behind them. I shared history that day, detailing centuries of Christian anti-Semitism that reached its zenith in the Third Reich, but more so, I shared apologies and sorrow for what our church had done. And when it was over, I was amazed at the gracious response of the people. Many shared that they had never before heard a Christian acknowledge what had happened, let alone share an apology. And person after person came up and touched me and shared the words *tikkun olam*, to my puzzlement. My friend Harriet saw my bewilderment and came over and whispered, it means "repairer of the breach," "healer of the world;" it's a compliment.

*Tikkun olam*, those are the words in verse 12 of our first lesson from the prophet Isaiah. They are a prophetic reminder of God's call to the people of God to our mission in the world. Paul tells us in our second lesson, the letter to the Corinthians, that this faith of ours is not about philosophical systems, it's not about getting the words right, it is about following this crucified Son of God, who was raised on Easter, giving us life, giving us hope and giving us a servant ministry in the world. Our Gospel today continues our reading of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus tells us we are God's light in the world, back to Isaiah, we are called to heal this broken and hurting world. To be healers of the breach. And Isaiah is specific about how this happens. Not with fancy ceremonies. Not with fasts and special clothes. No, it happens with servant ministry. Very specifically. To loose the bonds of injustice. To free the oppressed, to feed the hungry, the house the homeless, to clothe the naked. That God says, is when our light shines. And if that job description sounds familiar, it is what this Family of Faith struggles to do.

I want to tell you a story about Maurice Mannion-Vanover who died at the age of 20 on January 14. The Times had a half page feature on him two weeks ago. Maurice was born with AIDS to a crack addicted mother in Washington two decades

ago. There were physical and developmental issues severe enough that his twin sister Michelle died at the age of 20 months. And his parents abandoned him. And there was little hope that anyone would take this little baby with so many problems. But the two Tims did, becoming the first gay couple to adopt a child in Washington and a few years later adopting another boy who was 8 years older. 5 years later a job change brought them with their sons to Montclair. They had been told that Maurice would only live 6 months, but then to everyone's amazement, he thrived. He gained weight and his T cell count steadily rose. They hit bumps along the way including a serious heart problem when he was 8, but Maurice kept plugging away. He was a neighborhood character, loved by all. He traveled to Europe, Africa and Central America with his fathers and brother and he graduated from a special education high school. He was so involved in his church, especially in the food ministry which fed and cared for the hungry and homeless. His goal was to live on his own and he wanted to be an elementary school teacher's aide.

And then on a trip to Canada in January, Maurice became ill. And then he got worse...pneumonia, sepsis and acute renal failure. And from his hospital bed, several times he shared, "It's time." And because he had battled back so many times, it didn't occur to anyone this was all the time he had. But it was. At his funeral at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, his friend and Pastor, Father John Mennell recalled his beaming smile, his cut to the chase greetings, and his unerring instinct for doing the right thing, it not always the proper one. He recalled Maurice serving as an usher passing the offering plate, to one well to do parishioner in particular. Seeing what the man put in, Maurice amiably said "You can do better."

Let your light shine...feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, free the oppressed, loose the bonds of injustice. Its what we do, but we can do better. We can do better.