



“Belonging”
Mark 10:13-16
Oct. 4, 2009
Rev. Shelley Lavenne

This past week I learned that my friend and mentor, Sister Rita Duncan, died in July. Some of you may remember her name – I’ve said it often through the years. But we also had her out five years ago to do a weekend retreat.

Rita taught me pastoral care in a seniors’ care facility. One time, after our visiting, we students came back to talk with her. A visit with a senior man had sparked a student’s memory of his grandfather who died many years earlier. As he spoke of the memory, he became teary. There was silence. Rita didn’t rush in with Kleenex or brush off his experience.

She suggested that while he was a strong capable man now, it was the little boy inside of whom who cried, who hadn’t had a chance to grieve earlier.

Always such a wise woman. Sometimes as adults we find ourselves – for no reason at all becoming angry or upset at a situation in the present. And if we stop and reflect, we realize it might be from a situation in the past that we didn’t get a chance to grieve fully or heal from a hurtful incidence.

Our life can be a life-long journey of healing and moving towards wholeness.

A few weeks after that class, I attended a weekend retreat with Sr. Rita called Healing the Eight Stages of Life. The retreat leaders displayed all their books for sale and one was called: “Belonging: Bonds of healing and recovery.” (Paulist Press by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn, 2002).

“Hmm....said Sr. Rita. “What a good title. Everyone wants to Belong”.

“Hmm,” I thought. “I always want to belong.” I bought the book.

In our Scripture today, Jesus scoops the children in his arms and blesses them. He tells them they belong. We all belong. We belong to God, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit. It is our God who scoops us up and tells us we belong.

One of the writers of Belonging became Roman Catholic priest. He describes his adolescence as a time that he particularly didn’t feel he belonged. He hated himself and he hated other people.

He went to an all-boys Catholic school and had no one to invite to the prom. However, he was fortunate that a girl as equally unpopular as him didn’t have a date for the prom at the girls’ school and asked him to go with her. He got through the difficult evening and then a bit of a time later, he telephoned and asked if she would go with him to his prom.

Here's how he describes that telephone conversation:

“Dennis, I'd love to go to your Senior prom. Let me check with my mother. As she put the phone down, I could hear the whole conversation. Her mother was surprised and thrilled that anybody would invite this child to the senior prom...Her mother kept urging her: “Go! I'll buy you anything you need.” Finally, Kathleen got back on the phone....”I'm sorry. My Mother says I have to babysit. I can't go to your senior prom.”

“I felt so sad. But I wasn't surprised because I didn't like myself and I figured no one else did either.”

Later, after joining the Jesuits, he worked with an instructor priest. He was told to write down all the sins of his life in the past .

The man said: “I wrote eight pages, in the tiniest writing. I gave them to the priest and hoped he'd read them...Instead, he told me to share with him everything that I was really sorry about in my life.”

“It took over thirty minutes but what I remember is this, at the end of it, the priest stood up and gave me a hug. I was shocked. I had expected the usual sermon about how I had disappointed God and how I needed to make up my mind and try harder or I would ultimately suffer the painful consequences of hell ...I had never before experienced a hug that so assured me that at least this person and even God loved me whether I ever changed or not. I went back to my room and cried and cried grateful tears. In the midst of those tears, I promised aloud to God and myself that I would go anywhere, any time to help another experience such a transformation.”

“That hug filled me with a sense of belonging that changed my life. From then until now, I have loved myself. I would trade myself with anybody. Since then, I also have felt an almost automatic, effortless love for others. “ (From the Linns' Belonging)

May we remember that we belong to God. As so long ago Jesus scooped up the children to bless them; remember that the same love is bestowed upon us.