

Exuviae (the stuff left behind) **Proper 14, Year B – Ephesians 4:22 – 5:2**

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 9, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Okay, so I really like that we use a Lectionary in the Episcopal Church. Having grown up in a church that did *not*, I remember being aware, even as a child and youth, that our preachers kind of returned over and over to their favorite handful of biblical passages. That came in really handy when, as I alluded to a couple of weeks ago, my Dad was able to use the same two sermons all through his summer church-hopping preaching, though I'm still not entirely sure I found it all that convenient to *listen* to the same two sermons all summer.

Anyway, I like the Lectionary, and I generally think the Bishop Cranmer and his successors in the last five hundred or so years of lectionary creation have done a pretty good job of carving Scripture into coherent bite-sized pieces for our week-by-week consideration. But every now and then, every once in a while, I exercise the option granted even preachers in Lectionary based traditions like our own, to shorten the reading, as I did a couple of weeks ago when some of you looked up puzzled when I ended John's story of the feeding of the five thousand right after they collected the leftovers. And I saw a similar look on some faces a few moments ago when _____ began our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians three verses earlier than our little green sheet did. It looked like most of you caught back up about the time we got to the part about not letting "the sun go down on your anger." In any case, I think the Lectioneers missed a chance this once, so I lengthened our reading just a bit. I think they missed the chance, you see, to adequately give *context* to the point the Apostle is making in the published portion of his epistle.

Now, stay with me a minute more, because I came at *this* week's text even more sideways than usual.

While I was working on my yard yesterday, the yard I have pretty much neglected in my bouncing back and forth for the past month or so, while I was working on my yard yesterday, I was reminded of Paul's admonition that as Christians, we put away our old self, and clothe ourselves in a new self, "created," he says, "according to the likeness of God." I was reminded about that part that I had to add to today's reading by the songs of summer here in our area. Now, I told you you'd have to stay with me, because by songs of summer, I'm not talking about the Handy Blues Fest, which I *almost* missed back in June because I was off being a Rotarian in Brazil, but which Ella made sure I (ahem) *enjoyed* on my first day back in town. And I'm not talking about the Sandy Lee Watkins Songwriters' Festival last week, that I only got to attend *once* this year because of my less colorful travels up and down the Pennyrile here lately. I'm not even talking about Bluegrass in the Park, our *oldest* music festival in downtown Henderson, some of which I could hear from my house as I was finishing up with my yardwork late yesterday afternoon.

No, the songs of summer that got me thinking about shedding the old and putting on the new, is that perennial song so common here in these hottest days of summer: the shrill buzzing thrum of the *cicada*. When I was a kid, we used to call them 17-year locusts, which is really a misnomer on a *lot* of levels, since they aren't locusts at all, but a completely *different* taxonomic order of the insect class of arthropods, *and* the ones in Arizona are actually *annual* cicadas with a life-cycle of 2-3 years rather than periodical cicadas that have either a 13 or 17 year life-cycle. As I learned when I went digging, around here, the summer song that I was hearing yesterday, competing with both the bluegrass from the park, and the green grass of my yard getting trimmed by my weed eater, was no doubt produced by the males of one of the species of genus *Magicicada* belonging to *Brood XXIII*, the so-called *Lower Mississippi River*

Valley Brood, that began life in 2002, living and growing about a foot under our feet, sucking on plant roots all this time, before emerging a few weeks ago to begin the song that, at up to 120 dB, is loud enough to cause damage to human ears if it's too close. (I'm sorry, I learned a *lot* about cicadas, once I got to looking.)

Now, I don't know about girls, but if you've ever been a *boy*, or if you ever *raised* boys anywhere in cicadas' range – which is pretty much everywhere; they are found on every continent but Antarctica; sorry – then you have probably figured out by now how the song of the cicada got me thinking about this passage from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. You see, when the cicadas emerge from their two to three, to thirteen or *seventeen* years of sucking root sap in the deep, dark dirt, they have to change *one more time* before they begin their mature life, they have to change *one more time* before they can do what they were truly created to do – which is to make more cicadas, by the way – they have to change *one more time* before they can sing their life song. And so they drag themselves up from the dirt and the dark. And they haul themselves up some fence post, or flower stem, or tree bark. And they split that old skin right in half, and they leave that old self behind for boys and girls the world over to find and wonder about, and for the first time, they spread the wings of their new creation, and they *sing*.

And just *like* that, Paul says, we are meant to sluff off the old self, “corrupted and deluded,” he says, and clothe ourselves “with the new self,” he says, “created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” If we are to be imitators of God, he says, we are meant to put away falsehood, and we are meant to learn to speak the truth. With our identity and our birthright *sealed* by a splash of water and an oily smudge of blessing, we are meant to put away our taking, and our accumulating, and our hoarding, and our coveting. And we are meant to work, and to plan, and to share, and to give – of everything that we have, *and* of everything we *are*. As part of the Jesus Movement, we are meant to put away gossip, and back-biting, and tale-telling, and exaggeration, and innuendo, and flattery, and condescension, and putting people in their place, and hate-speech. And we are meant to use our thoughts, and our words, and our *prayers* to build *up*, and to build *grace*. By the power of Holy Spirit of God living within us, we are meant to put away bitterness, we are meant to put away wrath, we are meant to put away anger, and wrangling, and slander, and malice. And we are meant to begin singing our creation song, in *kindness*, and *tender-heartedness*, and *forgiveness*.

We are meant, Paul concludes, to put away whatever echo of life we have eked out in the dark and the dirt, to live... as children beloved by the Father of Creation. We are *meant* to live... in love, as Christ loved *us*. We are meant to live as part of one another, *members* of one another. We are meant to become, the Apostle says, a fragrant offering to God, and a song, loud and clear, to draw others to experience that *same* life, that *same* love.