

Saturday, June 17, 2017 - Day 167 – Ezra 10, Psalm 136, I Corinthians 11

I have only donned a veil for three occasions in my life—one at my wedding, any time I have been a guest in a country or religious setting where tradition dictates it, and most often when I am trying not to get stung by thousands of bees. You see, I am a bee keeper and have been for most of my life. My Dad likes to remind me of this by intermittently showing me a picture that he treasures of us tending to the hive together. In the photo, my father is decked out in his full bee keeping suit—long leather gloves, netting that covered his whole body, and the all-important beekeeper's veil— that kept the agitated bees (who assume, rightfully, that he was there to take their honey) from stinging him. I, on the other hand, am about three years old, in a light t-shirt, and the only protection I seem to have had is the hand-held smoke pot that kept the bees calm by simulating a forest-fire. Dad had, no doubt, employed me to work the small bellows on the pot so he could have his hands free to inspect the hive. For my part, I am smiling, apparently oblivious to the danger that my lack of veil put me in. And though my father could be accused of being reckless with my body's well-being, he was anything but with my soul's—teaching me that we kept bees because we are the stewards of this earth and are to care for the least of God's creatures. Thus begin my life as a beekeeper.

To keep bees is to be invited to help build a kingdom. The keeper and the bees labor side by side tending to the sick, feeding the hungry, building homes, and pollinating the world. You would not be the first to notice that sounds an awful lot like being a part of a church. In fact, the link between bees and the church is almost as old as Christendom itself and includes everything from theology to candles. At the high of the season there can be upwards of 35,000 bees in a healthy hive and they are all family—mostly all female, in fact. They share the same mother—their monarch the queen—and their common life together has long been lauded as a model for Christian community. It's easy to see why as they all work for common good of the hive and each worker bee is a servant to her fellow sisters and queen even from the moment she is born. As she hatches and crawls out of the comb where she has been feed by her older sisters, she takes her duty as a janitor of the nursery, before becoming a nursemaid herself. In her short forty-day life span, she will have performed every job in the hive—from cleaner and feeder, to builder and architect, to guardian and soldier, to explorer and gatherer. No job is too small or too big in service to the hive.

When Paul wrote this selection from his letter to the church he founded in Corinth, he was concerned about the life of their "hive." There had been a lot of fighting in this church and people were doing things that were intentionally hurtful and divisive. There were fights about prophesying, there were fights about food, there were even fights about making women wear veils to cover their heads. Paul was left to try and sort those disagreements out as best he could and gave answers for some of the specific and smaller problems (like the veils) that may seem very different to the way we would solve them today but were made for the health of the group.

However, for the really major problems—like the rich members of the community eating all the food at their Eucharistic meals before their poorer members even got off work and could join them— Paul insisted that everyone in the church must remember that they are like family to every other member. He reminds them of this by pointing back to the union that we have with Christ through Communion. We are all one members of the one Body of Christ, and when we live otherwise, we cause major damage to that unity. He could have easily used bees to make his point. They, like us, all share one parent. They, like us, need to work together to bring keep their little kingdom strong and healthy for all its members. They, like us, need to live as a unit so that the world can benefit from the activities of our hive.

I love being a beekeeper. These sisterly, scrappy, sacred little insects have taught me much about the Christian life and I am grateful that I get to step into their world to help build their kingdom. It gives me strength and inspiration to go out and to the same for God's peaceable kingdom in the world—veil and all.

By The Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining