

I read some news in the Lakeville Journal about Lime Rock this week: The brief piece said, “Alonzo Winterbottom is housed up with a cold.” It was from that section in the journal about the news 100 years ago. I love it: “Alonzo Winterbottom is housed up with a cold.”

Not very exciting news. We wouldn't consider it news at all these days. It makes you wonder about the community then. Did they care for each other more than we do now? Was a cold a more serious thing than it is now? Or was Mr. Winterbottom such a well-known figure in town that everyone wanted to know everything that happened to him.

Trinity Church was only about 30 years old at the time. Did they pray for him here in the prayers of the people that Sunday? It's kind of amazing how much one little sentence of a news report can get us thinking about our history as a parish, and the history of this community. How connected were the people of Lime Rock then, one to another? We found out a few months ago that although communication with our neighbors here in Lime Rock isn't simple because there is no central gathering place, it is possible, and people do turn out for a community event.

The theme of the morning is redemption and reconciliation. We are redeemed by God for God. And God's will is that we be reconciled, one to another and to God. We will look at the Isaiah passage, the Gospel reading, and AA's steps 8, 9 and 10.

For the Israelites in our passage from Isaiah, they worried that God would never find them in Babylon. But Isaiah says that God will come to his people on a highway, and God will redeem them. The picture that Isaiah paints for us is that of a desert where everything is dry, and the sand is burning, but God's grace comes like a welcome rain. God renews the desert and renews us. Just as the rain causes dormant plants and cacti to bloom, we can bloom too.

Blooming is not a metaphor to tell us to put on nice clothes and look pretty. It is a metaphor for living a full life, one where we bloom on the inside. How does this happen? Blooming involves getting up, getting gout and being faithful through our relationships with those around us. Somebody cared enough about Alonzo Winterbottom to write a line in the LJ about his illness. Every time you or I pick up the phone, or write a note, or send an email to someone who could use a little cheering up it is like a flower blooming in the desert. And every time we set a relationship right that has gone awry we are getting back on the highway of God. And even me, a fool, can be found on that highway. I make mistakes. I say the wrong things sometimes to people or I say them at the wrong time. We all do, but we also all have the opportunity to get back to a right relationship with others, and with God. They do go

hand in hand.

We have come to steps 8, 9 and 10 in our little survey of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Step 8, made a list of persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. Step 9, made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others. And Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory of ourselves, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it. These are steps of redemption and reconciliation.

Steps 8 and 9, where we make a list of people whom we have harmed...at least all those we can remember having harmed, and then make amends to them is tough stuff. Here I have to tell you one of the slogans of AA, "the steps are in order for a reason." Sometimes, when we are newly sober, we are so enthusiastic about life. We feel good, maybe for the first time in a long time, and we want to tell everyone we are starting a new life. With close family we do want to talk about how sorry we are for things we have done, but with all the other relationships in our lives, it's best to hold off on the apologies until some time has passed, about the length of time it takes to get to steps 8 and 9. This is where an AA sponsor is important.

This reconciliation business requires more courage, more honesty and willingness. We cannot continue on God's Holy Way without help and without the grace of God to strengthen us. And, it must be said that not all broken relationships are our fault. But we can do our part in all cases to keep our side of the street clean, and reach out our hand in love and forgiveness at the appropriate time.

Step 10, is self explanatory. Clearly it is not enough to do a step 4 and 5 and then be done with an examination of our faults for the rest of our lives. We will all continue to err, but the beauty of sobriety, and a new relationship with God, is that we become more aware of our behavior and, at least, can recognize when we have gone off the beam and need to make amends. I'm sure you can see by now that these steps, although difficult, are something that not only addicts and alcoholics can benefit from.

And example of reconciliation on a large scale is found in thinking about our enemies of WW II; Germany, Italy and Japan. The world is reconciled to those countries now and we wouldn't be able to function as a world economy and a global community if we had not been willing to do so.

When Jesus healed Peter's mother in law he released her from her illness and made her able to get up, feel like living again, and fulfilling her purpose in life. Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. He healed her and then she got up and began to serve. She could

get back to work. For all of us who have been sick, whether of body, mind or spirit, being able get to work, find a new vocation, and just do everyday chores that we were not able to do before is a gift. I heard two friends in recovery recently who were overjoyed because they could finally hold down jobs. One was thrilled to be able to buy his very own washing machine – not something we normally consider to be very thrilling. Another was pleased to be able to fill out a 1040 EZ form and pay his taxes, like other normal people.

Restoration to health, and restoration of damaged relationships go hand in hand. I'll talk more about his next week when we hear another story of healing from the Gospel of Mark. Remember that Jesus says, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?"

God wishes us to be redeemed and reconciled. That is what Jesus brought to us from God and he told this message to everyone who would listen. The good news is that here we can experience the healing touch of Jesus through our life and prayer together, and through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Our redemption and renewal start at the Table, and with that healing grace we can get up, continue the mission of Jesus, and serve the world in God's name.