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ST. BARNABAS CHURCH - AMERICAN SUNDAY - AUGUST 3, 2008

Good morning.

For me, the American Sunday service at St. Barnabas has always been one of the best traditions of our parish and our community. Reaching back across the generations, it has provided an opportunity for Americans among us to express, in their own words, what North Hatley has meant to them and how it has affected their lives. This is no less true for me, standing here today, calling back to memory the years, the people, the place itself, and how all have become inevitably intertwined.

To stand here, with the flags of both countries behind me, is a tangible reminder of the strong links between our two nations and the even closer ties between the village of North Hatley and the United States. Were it not for this cross cultural pollination, I believe North Hatley would not have evolved in the unique way that it has. Look at the plaques on the walls around us, from the one for Louisa Nairn Smith, Louisa Eaton's grandmother, to the right of the front door, around to the one for David Worcester, Eloise Bender's first husband, and almost all of them honor Americans with close family ties to this community. And a closer

inspection will reveal that a majority of the items throughout the church marked with brass memorial plates, were given by the Daves family from Baltimore, all of whom were so bound up with the earliest years of North Hatley as a summer haven.

A curious and very satisfying North Hatley coincidence occurred at the foot of the church steps here, about, say, two years ago. It was a clear, cold April Sunday morning and after the service, I found myself standing next to a lady, who joined me in looking at the houses across the lake. We introduced ourselves as Betty Horton and Page Dame, and she remarked that her family had owned that “yellow house”, now the home of Hope and Jacques Tetreault. I told her that I had grown up in the double gabled house next door and had a vivid memory, from when I would have been about eight or nine years old, of the Black family who lived there, their lovely teen age daughter, who looked quite glamorous in a one piece, white bathing suit, and of the big, inboard motor boat her father had named for her, the *Betty Ann*. “Well,” she said, “that was Mrs. Brent’s house and I remember well her young grandson who was always with her”. “My God,” I exclaimed, “you’re Betty Black!” “And you are Mrs. Brent’s grandson,” she shot right back. This, some sixty years on, and the crossing of our paths

here at St. Barnabas is as remarkable to me now as it was then.

Yet, we are in the Lord's House and I believe that a meaningful reflection must incorporate not only what goes on in this church and what we worship, but also, how all of this is connected to what we can refer to as the North Hatley experience.

Over the years, when meeting a Canadian friend for the first time after arriving, a common greeting was: "Well, how was your winter?" As though, no matter what the length of your stay, the best part of life takes place here, implying that now all will be warm and good and our lives can expand beyond the boundaries laid down in wherever it is we may come from.

In North Hatley, we are all caught up with celebrating the past as much as the present; in observing family and community traditions that have come to define, for many of us, the richness of our lives here. And so it is with the church, as we cycle through the annual celebration of events in the life of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. Today's gospel, the Parable of the Loaves and the Fishes, is no exception. One of the most familiar stories in the Bible, its details have been ingrained in us since our earliest

days in Sunday School. What it seems to say, among other things, is that there is plenty for all, if we but look around and do with what we have, without pretense, and without searching for more than what we already possess.

And so it is here in North Hatley. Abundantly so. We are blessed with a richness and diversity of landscape, which, coupled with the timeless beauty of the view up the lake towards Black Point and beyond, provide us with ample evidence of God's grace at work in the natural world. Once, some years ago, while standing on the O'Connor's beach, Sheila observed me gazing up the lake and remarked, "It's magic, isn't it." Yes. Indeed it is.

Simplicity in most things is best, I think. We are happiest when we can strip away the layers of superficial decoration from our lives and get down to the bed rock of what can make daily life a quiet satisfaction. I am fond of saying, "Thank God this is North Hatley, not Palm Beach" - and by that I mean to convey all manner of things as they relate to how we do what we do here, be it a quiet weekday or a crowded Saturday.

Whether year around inhabitant or seasonal resident, all of us have been equally blessed to be part of a community of people remarkable for their

warmth and intelligence, their neighborliness and caring, and equally as much for their camaraderie and love of a good time. Taken together, these attributes make for an irresistible combination. I, for one, need look no further in order to have a full measure of the best that life has to offer.

What has been achieved here is a rare combination of place and people in proportions necessary to create what my wonderful grandmother, Hally Brent, would have called an atmosphere of 'enchantment'. I find as much happiness in quietly contemplating the rhythm of the light and the wind on the lake, or the river, as I do in engaging in a lively political or social discussion while standing on a crowded July or August porch. What binds all of us together, I think, is an abiding love of the place. We are at peace here. In company or in solitude. The people are the icing on the cake.

I do, in fact, give thanks to God for what has been brought forth here by those that have gone before. It is hard to put into words. In the years that I was living overseas, the pangs of regret and longing felt so keenly while walking along a hot summer sidewalk in Tokyo or Singapore or Sydney were brought on by the thought of being far from North Hatley and unable to savor what I knew others were enjoying. It was a high price to pay. In

retrospect, almost too high. I look over my shoulder now, at the years gone by, the people known well and now gone, and feel immeasurably enriched. For me, the real testament to the lasting legacy of this place is provided by the number of American families and friends, who led full, notable, and indeed distinguished lives elsewhere, yet who have chosen, each for their own reasons, to return one last time and be buried here, to see out eternity on that lovely, sloping hillside leading down to the Massawippi River. If I give you names such as Eloise Bergland Bender, Jane Cole Bradley, (who lies next to her husband Douglas – theirs a North Hatley romance), Arthur and Jeanette Virgin, Osmun and Valentine Fort, Frank Keppel, and Libby and Jack Griffin, you will know what I mean. Just a few weeks ago, this was given new meaning when Louisa Griffin Eaton, a lifelong intimate friend and confidant, taken too soon from us, was interred there next to her parents, just before her memorial service in this church.

And just yesterday, we gathered with Charlie Hickox, as our great friend Edie was laid to rest in that same serene and simple spot. And I am as certain of this as I am of anything, that Louisa and Edie are both safely landed on Canaan's farther shore.

When my mother died two years ago, we had two services for her, one here and one in Baltimore. For me, by far the most meaningful and fraught with a feeling of what has passed away and gone, was the one here at St.

Barnabas. Home is where the heart is and what I have just recited is ample proof of that. When the time comes, I will join their ranks and be secure in the knowledge that I am on that long road to eternity in very good company indeed. I like to think that beyond that far distant horizon I will be able to hear the clink of an ice cube, the pop of a cork, and the laughing chatter of good conversation. I am reminded of the well known words of Warren Ransom, Sr., that “If heaven is not exactly like North Hatley, then I don’t want to go there”.

In the meantime, however, I give thanks for being here, amongst you, and in this place. For that is a blessing and I am deeply grateful.

Amen.

