

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle B July 8, 2012

Sometimes, we learn more about the people closest to us after they have passed on to the next life...and it can be a bit disconcerting. I just learned that my mom, who passed away nearly four years ago, dabbled in the stock market and made some money in the process. My dad passed this information rather nonchalantly during one of our recent weekly lunches. My mom worked the finances quite well to the benefit of all concerned, something that took me by surprise.

We love to "box people in," thinking we have them figured out according to our own assumptions and prejudices. My mom, with little education, was a minor financier who took some risks with scarcely a lot of money. I thought I knew everything about her character. I had my mom in "motherly box" that viewed her in some very limited ways.

Last week, in the world of political intrigue, a supreme court justice ruled on the health care mandate in a way that befuddled his supporters: those who knew in absolute terms that he would vote the mandate unconstitutional. Chief Justice Roberts ruled in favor of the health care mandate. Whether it is a tax or a penalty I will leave to the experts, whoever they are. This justice was placed in a "judicial box" and he was expected to parody the views of his conservative supporters.

When people act outside the boxes we have put them in, we get confused and even angry. Jesus has such an experience in his own town with his own people. That thought they knew him so well: "Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James...where did this man get all of this...they took offense." They had Jesus in their own little "box" and he was speaking words that defied the parameters of the box. Prophets tend to do just that, and when they come from our own stock, we take offense. And so Jesus could do little in his home town because the people there lacked faith, a prerequisite for healing.

Every prophet thinks outside the "box," to the point that they make us uncomfortable. Ezekiel was a prophet sent to the people in exile to speak to them about why they were in exile and the hope that was theirs with a change of heart. Clearly, he was out of the box.

My spiritual director gave me piece of paper, actually an old envelope, and on it drew a square and wrote the word "God" in the middle with arrows pointing away from the box. The message clear: don't put God in a box; God will have none of that. We can say very little about God and actually, we can say more about what God is not than what he is. To keep God out of our own self-made boxes that constrict his love and presence prevents us from growing in the spiritual life.

But the most suffocating box we create is the one we create by ourselves, years in the making fortified by illusion and false teaching. Liturgy, the scriptures...and Christ are realities that are meant to destroy all boxes, especially the one we are living in.