

## Part of Creation -- Proper 28C

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth, sayeth the Lord. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. No more shall the sound of weeping be heard. One who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth. They shall be offspring blessed by the Lord. Before they even call I will answer them, while they are yet speaking I will hear them.

The thrust of today's Word is that Creation is beyond the human capacity to imagine. Nothing is beyond God's capacity to make change for the better. Sometimes forgiving us and forgetting is the gift: holy amnesia, Batman! And our newness is not earned or even deserved but a free gift from the universal force who knows how we can be transformed and seeks to make that happen even before our prayers are formed.

Today's psalm 98 also celebrates the glory of God's creative, refreshing power, as if the World had just been made this morning: O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. Break forth into joyous song and sing praises with the lyre and the sound of melody, with trumpets and the sound of the horn. Make a joyful noise.

As with our yearly cycle of festivals (about to begin again in a couple weeks), wherein Jesus is expected every Advent, born again every year on Christmas and crucified every Good Friday, only to defy death again on Easter, the World is created anew each time we recall its creation. In truth, every time our hearts and hands open to engage with one another, forgive one another or care for one another, the World is being created anew. YHWH's storied triumph over the forces of chaos, a story far older than Christianity and the Hebrew Bible, begins again in every moment of human charity. This is a particularly

central element of our lives when we are mourning the departure of a loved one, or anticipating the arrival of the greatest one in a few weeks' time at Christmas. In one way, there is little to be said. As John Hayes has written, "Christmas is a time for song and celebration more than a time for syllogism and cogitation." The same is true for the days after a loved one dies. There is nothing to figure out.

In fact, it's even ok to get a little nutty about it, which is why the psalmist goes on with: Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord. I don't quite know what that means, but it sounds great, hills singing and floods clapping their hands.

Jesus said, "all will be thrown down; do not be terrified: these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately. There will be great earthquakes, and dreadful portents from heaven. They will persecute you; and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name, but this will just give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds: by your endurance you will gain your souls." Whew! It was Mark Twain who quipped, "I'm not troubled by things in the Bible I don't understand; it's things in there I do understand that bother me."

How many rumors, statistics, false prophets and betrayals has humanity experienced since Jesus' time? As we have often observed, it is impossible to delineate or analyze a calendar of eternity. Yet everybody wants to have the inside scoop, the perfect system, the last word; just like everybody wants to be in show business.

What Jesus is doing, just as the letter to the Thessalonians does in its blunt and often-misinterpreted way, is telling us to

set aside final thoughts and just do the work, the miraculous work of being Christians. Martin Luther's famous response when asked what he'd do if he found out today was going to be the last day: "I'd plant an apple tree." We can't figure it out or surround it, we can only persist; and Jesus says this is everything. This clarity of purpose is what dries our tears and brings into our faces what Howard Thurman described as, "...a subtle radiance, a settled serenity; and into our relationships a vital generosity that opens the sealed doors of the heart to all who are encountered along the way."

When our will power doesn't avail, or seems not to, that's when we will be given the words to say and the strength to carry on if we ask for them. That's when we will become for each other today, what others have been for us in our yesterdays. We will become for each other what Jesus promises to be for us always. The great troubadour Lou Reed described the effect we can have on each other and the world when our love of persistence opens our hearts to the persistence of love:

*"I'll be your mirror, reflect what you are  
In case you don't know.  
I'll be the wind, the rain, and the sunset  
The light on your door  
To show that you're home."*

Cynthia Bourgeault writes: "True love is given to mirror and manifest God on earth, and not for self-realization and personal happiness. With the acceptance of those terms, the path comes into being." Whatever else we can or cannot do, giving ourselves to this love project is the work. And it always begins as an inside job.

As Santa Teresa of Ávila (Spain) admonished: “Our trials and disturbances mostly come from our not understanding ourselves.” Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux (France) called it her “science of love.” She tried always to see how her own thoughts and feelings got in the way of her “vocation” of love. We too must make the observation of our own thought processes a habit, for all too often, we impede our own efforts to love.

It is a fundamental observation of the Zen masters that a mirror is without thought or pride. If a face comes before it, that exact face is reflected. Likewise a chair, an automobile, a hat. The mirror shows a crooked object to be crooked and a straight object to be straight. Everything is revealed as it really is, without consciousness on the part of the mirror. The mirror does not store a self, so it is always available to receive the other. There are no preconditions for acceptance into a mirror’s gaze, it merely receives and reflects back what is there, nothing more and nothing less. It sees the way God sees.

Love itself is first of all hidden. We aren’t able to understand it until we learn to see more deeply, unless we clean the glass into which we are looking. The Zen masters call it wiping the mirror. In a clean mirror, we can see exactly what’s there without its being distorted—not what we’re worried about or hoping we’ll find there. Wiping the mirror is the discipline of observing my own thoughts and behaviors, what I pay attention to and what I ignore, in order to understand myself well enough to get my own ego out of the way, to be directed and held by the foundational goodness and acceptance of the universe, to be part of the ongoing Creation. This is our vocation; our holy purpose, if only we will embrace and engage it. When we do, when the eyes and ears are open, even the leaves of the trees become as pages of a universal Bible.

Thomas Dorsey's hymn, *Precious Lord*.

Precious Lord, take my hand; lead me on, let me stand  
I'm tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light;  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord linger near,  
When my life is almost gone.  
Hear my cry, hear my call; hold my hand lest I fall  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.

When the darkness appears and the night draws near,  
And the day is past and gone,  
At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand;  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.

Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, Let me stand  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;  
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.