

The Sunday Missive – February 13, 2022 The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Hymn 296 We know that Christ is raised and dies no more

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more.
Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold,
and our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia!

We share by water in his saving death.
Reborn, we share with him an Easter life
as living members of a living Christ. Alleluia!

The Father's splendor clothes the Son with life.
The Spirit's power shakes the church of God.
Baptized, we live with God, the Three in One. Alleluia!

A new creation comes to life and grows
as Christ's new body takes on flesh and blood.
The universe, restored and whole, will sing: Alleluia! Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYS491Bpuac>

The Collect of the Day

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of

drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked* ***Or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;***

But their delight is in the law of the Lord* ***And on God's law they meditate day and night.***

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in due season* ***And their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.***

The wicked are not so* ***They are like chaff that the wind drives away.***

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment* ***Nor evildoers in the congregation of the righteous;***

For the Lord watches over the ways of the righteous* ***But the ways of the wicked will perish.***

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Hymn 758 You have come down to the lakeshore

You have come down to the lakeshore
seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
but only asking for me to follow.

Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes;
kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat;
now with you, I will seek other seas.

You know full well what I have, Lord;
neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,
just these my fish nets and will for working.

You who have fished other waters;
you, the longing of souls that are yearning:
O loving Friend, you have come to call me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N6z4DDQrpl>

Luke 6:17-26

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Blessed are the Extra-dependent

With thanks to Henry Oemig

Those who have faced the hatred and pain of this world are God’s true prophets. By virtue of their suffering, they are closer to the suffering of all. Consequently, they are closer to whatever response the benevolent Creator has to that suffering. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, “I cannot experience the reality of God without the reality of this world; nor can I experience the reality of this world without the reality of God.” He spent the last two years of his life in Nazi concentration camps.

This is the core of Jesus’ message in what has become known as the “Sermon on the Plain” here in Luke’s Gospel. In the ears of the Greco-Roman audience, Jesus’ social teaching was met with outrage. As in most of history, the rich and powerful despised the poor and took pains to preserve the gulf between them. But Jesus is at pains to insist that worldly things: worldly wealth and power are great impediments to Godly wisdom and authentic human experience.

One day, it is said, a rich man came to the Rabbi. He had great wealth, but he was a miser. The Rabbi took him by the hand and led him to the window.

“Look out there,” he said, and the man looked out into the street, “what do you see?”

“People,” answered the man. Again, the Rabbi took him by the hand and led him over to a mirror. “What do you see now?” “Now I see myself,” responded the rich man.

Then the Rabbi said, “Behold, in the window, there is glass, and in the mirror, there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others but see only yourself.

Perhaps Jesus message is that only those who see others fully experience life. And the more silver you have, the harder that becomes. Christianity has more to do with being responsively human than being superbly spiritual

and successful. And it involves conversion, not from human being to spiritual hero, but from isolation and self-interest to compassion and solidarity with humanity.

In developmental psychology, the Oscillation Theory, as propounded by Anglican theologian Bruce Reed, describes the ongoing process in which we – unconsciously and intuitively – move in and out of periods of activity and renewal for the sake of gathering physical, emotional and mental energy for the tasks ahead, and to help us make meaning of whatever lies before us.

Reed describes it like this: “For most people, the ordering of everyday life provides regular cycles of oscillation. If we are well, each day includes periods when we address ourselves to the problems of living, and periods when we are fed and cared for, relax, reflect and sleep. At times, we are “acting,” taking action, at other times, we are just being. The two states of “acting” and “being” are described as “intra-dependence” and “extra-dependence.”

In extra-dependency mode, we rely on something beyond ourselves or outside our ability to control to get help. Intra-dependency on the other hand is to be able to rely upon our own abilities and authority or those of others we know to function in the world.

So, for example, we have a child playing in the park. On occasion, he will run back to his mother, sitting on the park bench, either just to check in or if he falls off the swing, to get a hug and be reassured. While playing on the swing, he (or she) is in her intra-dependent mode: “ta da!” She is doing just fine, thank you. However, when she falls or needs to check in, she is in her “extra-dependent” mode, calling on a power (in this case, Mom) greater than herself.

We naturally move back and forth between these two states, doing and being, but that the movement is particularly noticeable – and sometimes abrupt -- during life’s transitions; loss of employment, divorce, the death of someone close, a family member or friend, upsets the rhythm of oscillation. In those moments, it’s like changing the playback speed on a recording; the cadence of life is disrupted, and we aren’t able to rest, relax and regroup the way we need to. Instead, we suffer.

When people encounter the possibilities of faith – the people on the plain listening to Jesus, or us here in church on Sunday -- we retreat from our own states of intra-dependence, doing and handling things on our own, in

order to find meaning and renewal in the extra-dependent state offered by faith. Belief, religion, is a corporate activity that provides a ritual setting for one mode of the oscillation process: the extra-dependent mode. Quite literally, our worship and fellowship “bind together” our lives. We come here to seek rest, sanction and strength for our lives outside. This place – like the plain in Luke’s gospel, where all are equal and “on the level,” is a place of meaning-making and renewal, where we come to prepare ourselves to actively engage the world in which we work, serve and live.

It seems clear throughout the gospels, and especially here in the Sermon on the Plain, that the people who follow Jesus have recognized the limits of their intra-dependence. The ones who gather on the plain are the ones who know they need a power greater than themselves to heal them, and they believe Jesus is somehow the source of this power. They have long since given up on finding personal resources or privilege or clout that would entitle them to anything. They have no “rights” *per se*. They are the forgotten fringe and they know it. As such, they do not believe in a human solution will be their answer—whether bitcoin NFT’s, nationalistic militancy or the latest self-help guru. What they need a power that is greater than their plight, and they believe this power is to be found in Jesus. It is as simple as and as complicated as that. And they are ready to risk themselves—to abandon themselves—to this “Jesus extra-dependence.”

Jesus describes these extra-dependents – the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed – as curiously blessed. These lost sheep are the ones who will find and be found. And because of their emptiness and incapability of alleviating their own suffering, they hunger to receive the gifts Jesus has for them. These have-nots are the blessed ones, says Jesus.

Ironically, those who are most successful at being intra-dependent – the ones who appear to have the world by the tail and under their control -- are the woeful ones. Just the opposite of what our culture would indicate: Woe to you who win the lottery? Woe to you who are full – of importance, of praise, of power. Who does Jesus think he’s kidding? But this woe that Jesus announces is painfully indicative of a doleful and lonely state of being. ‘The opposite of joy is not sorrow, but unbelief,’ seems to be what Jesus is saying here.

Here’s Stephen Mitchell, in *The Gospel According to Jesus*, “I feel that Jesus touched people from a place of great presence and love. He was in contact with the essence of these sick people, and they recognized that. And if they

were open to him, they could receive that love he offered. In addition, they were ready to let go of something. There was an opening in them that was probably there before they saw him, but when they saw him, there was a deeper opening that allowed them to move through pain and suffering in order to be healed.

This ability to let go, this capacity to open oneself to Jesus is the entry point to the blessedness of the Kingdom of God. For those with no checkbook to fall back on, and being beyond the hope of self-cure, and for those who are simply sceptical, dubious, self-aware or just plain tired of being in charge, surrender to grace appears as more than just a real possibility. It is the only game in town.

Hymn 423 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd0FyrzVUCM&t=84s>

How to Love

After stepping into the world again,
there is that question of how to love,
how to bundle yourself against the frosted morning—
the crunch of icy grass underfoot, the scrape
of cold wipers along the windshield—
and convert time into distance.

What song to sing down an empty road
as you begin your morning commute?
And is there enough in you to see, really see,
the three wild turkeys crossing the street
with their featherless heads and stilt-like legs
in search of a morning meal? Nothing to do
but hunker down, wait for them to safely cross.

As they amble away, you wonder if they want
to be startled back into this world. Maybe you do, too,
waiting for all this to give way to love itself,
to look into the eyes of another and feel something—
the pleasure of new love in the unbroken night,
your wings folded around each other, on the other side
of this ragged January, as if a long sleep has ended.

January Gill O'Niel