

THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S DAY
Sunday 2nd February 2020 – Epiphany 4

Worth Pondering

“Thinking theologically... means more than just interpreting our given ‘orthodox’ biblical tradition and creedal statements. It also means being willing to think differently to how we have in the past” *(Sallie McFague)*

The Gathering of The People of God:

Speak, Lord, in the stillness, while we wait on thee
Hushed our hearts to listen in expectancy.
Speak, O Blessed Master, in this quiet hour;
Let us see thy face Lord, feel thy touch of power.

Emily May Grimes 1868-1927

CALL TO WORSHIP:

God fills this place of gathering.

The whole earth is full of God's glory. **Amen.**

HYMN: *(Tune: TIS 233 “I will sing the wondrous story”)*

For the music of creation,
for the song your Spirit sings,
for your sound's divine expression,
burst of joy in living things:
God, our God, the world's composer,
hear us, echoes of your voice:
music is your art, your glory,
let the human heart rejoice!

Psalms and symphonies exalt you,
drum and trumpet, string and reed,
simple melodies acclaim you,
tunes that rise from deepest need,
hymns of longing and belonging,
carols from a cheerful throat,
lilt of lullaby and lovesong
catching heaven in a note.

**All the voices of the ages
in transcendent chorus meet,
worship lifting up the senses,
hands that praise and dancing feet;
over discord and division
music speaks your joy and peace,
harmony of earth and heaven,
song of God that cannot cease!**

Shirley Murray

Act of Awareness:

Each morning brings a newness that we need but step into.
It can wash us,
lift us, heal us, hold us
just as each of us has need.

May we be open to the power that lies dormant within us.

May we be full with confidence in our own strength.

May we move from the routines that we follow

to the fullness of life that we might live.

(Gretta Vosper/hb)

The Commandments:

Jesus said:

This is my commandment,

that you love one another as I have loved you.

(silent reflection)

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD:

Let us hear what God the LORD will speak.

The Lord will speak peace to the people, to the faithful,

to those who turn to God in their hearts.

From the World Around us: "Sermon on the Mount: A Theology of Resistance"

Lindsay Paris-Lopez. 9 February 2017, *patheos.com*

"How are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the ones who hunger and thirst for justice, blessed? Jesus blessed the people on the margins of his culture by embracing them, showing solidarity with them, building a community in which those who had always been shunned were welcomed and loved.

"As the body of Christ, we are called to be that blessing. Of course, this means we must stand with the immigrants and refugees who seek opportunity or

simply survival in our nation, but it also means we must stand with those who mourn their loved ones in the wake of our government's drone attacks. Suffering far outlasts any administration, and our commitment to the needs of those suffering must transcend partisanship.

"One problem with connecting advocacy to partisan political outrage is that often the needs of the people get lost in the desire to "win." Jesus's vision of healing a world in pain begins with blessing, not blame, so that we may keep our focus on those in need of comfort. Where rivalry crushes victims, compassion recognizes them and enters into their pain."

GOSPEL READING:

Matthew 5:1-11 *(Inclusive Text)*

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill.

There he sat down and was joined by the disciples.

Then Jesus began to speak. This is what he taught them:

How happy are the poor in spirit:

theirs is the unfolding of the divine dream.

How happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage.

Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called beloved of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:

theirs is the unfolding of the divine dream.

In the testimony of God's people

We hear the Word of the Lord

HYMN: *(Tune: TIS 276 "There's a light upon the mountain")*

**Take my gifts and let me love you,
God who first of all loved me,
gave me light and food and shelter,
gave me life and set me free,
now because your love has touched me,
I have love to give away,
now the bread of love is rising,
loaves of love to multiply.**

**Take the fruit that I have gathered
from the tree your Spirit sowed,
harvest of your own compassion,
juice that makes the wine of God,
spiced with humour, laced with laughter --
flavour of the Jesus life,
tang of risk and new adventure,
taste and zest beyond belief.**

**Take whatever I can offer --
gifts that I have yet to find,
skills that I am slow to sharpen,
talents of the hand and mind,
things made beautiful for others
in the place where I must be:
take my gifts and let me love you,
God who first of all loved me.**

*Shirley Murray, from In Every Corner Sing,
Hope Publishing, 1992.*

The WORD – “Thou shalt not stand idly by”

Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel once claimed to be able to condense the entire ethical teaching of the Bible into one sentence, “Thou shalt not stand idly by.” How could one summarize so many years’ worth of religious writings into a single sentence? One that sounds like a take-off of one of the Ten Commandments, at that? If Moses needed 10, how could Mr Weisel’s single command be so all encompassing? Is it possible that such a simple statement really captures what it is that God wants us to understand? Is this actually the message that God sent to us in Scripture?

What does it mean to not stand idly by? Obviously, there is the connotation that we must do good works. This claim is apparent in the sentence. In making this claim Weisel is telling us that we cannot just stand there, he is saying that we must get to work. This claim is found over and over again in Scripture. In fact, it is my humble opinion that this call to endeavour on behalf of others is the central message of the New Testament. Perhaps, the biggest thing God did through Jesus was to teach us that we cannot just stand there, that we are expected to act. If you don’t think that the authors of the New Testament focused on our actions and told us to serve one another out of love more often than anything else they desired to teach us, then maybe you ought to read the texts again.

Pastor Roger Ray once claimed to his congregation that if they could not remember Weisel’s words, he would have them tattooed on his body where everybody could

see them. Well, I don't know if he had, but I know I certainly remember the words. I am compelled by this charge to take responsibility for one another, to live a life that serves God through serving other human beings. But, I am also driven to ask if that is really all there is to being a Christian. While I stated earlier that I believe that the call to serve and to work for social justice is the central theme of the New Testament, it certainly does not capture all of faith or all of the teachings of the Bible. I am unable to see only calls to action in biblical texts. There is so much more to be discovered! So, is Ellie Weisel way off base, or is there more in his sentence than just a call to action? I believe that there is more to be found in the words of this Jewish Holocaust survivor than a simple call to work hard for other people.

We are not called to a passive faith. Christians are not called to simply go to church, hear what the pastor says and to try and remember it for five or six days. There is much more to being a Christian and there is certainly much more to being a person of true faith. We are called to search for God. In giving us Scripture, God has given us a challenge. God seems to be saying, "Here, read this, know and experience these others, and then come to know me." It is not that we must all be biblical scholars or physiologists. More simply we are each being asked to make an effort. God does not want the church, your parents, your spouse or your neighbour to spoon-feed you faith. God desires you to develop your own faith. You and I are not meant to idly subscribe to the faith of other people.

The story familiar to those of Christian faith is the story of the prodigal son, found in the 15th chapter of Luke. One of the remarkable insights that the careful reader may glean from this story is the attitude of the father. I invite you to read the story again. What you will see is that the father does not wish for his son to stay when an inheritance is demanded of him. This is not because he is hurt or angry, but it looks to me that the father wants his son to go and learn some things. He wants his son to undergo the journey that will unfold due to his actions. It is not the father's wish that his son stay with him idly working through his life. It is the hope of the father that the journey will lead his son to understand the value and the love of home. God is very much like that father as far as I can tell. It is not God's desire that we attend church and idly fulfill our duties. God hopes that we will be able to make our own choices and that we will subsequently design our own journey. It seems clear that God's wants us to make this journey and that this journey will end in discovering God's eternal love.

In the simple sentence offered to us by a man who encountered hell on earth in the form of the Nazi Holocaust, we find a call to work for social justice and for the good of God's people, but also we find a summons to inquire about God for ourselves. God asks us in Scripture to be active, not to be leisurely Christians. We are to be vigorous in our religious endeavours. In both our quests for the common good and in our own spiritual journeys, we are to be diligent and effective. So, Weisel just might have captured all of the ethical teachings of our sacred scriptures in their entirety when he said, "Thou shalt not stand idly by."

HYMN: AHB 551

I sing a song of the saints of God,
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
And one was a shepherdess on the green;
They were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
And his love made them strong;
And they followed the right for Jesus' sake
The whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
And one was slain by a fierce wild beast;
And there's not any reason, no, not the least,
Why I shouldn't be one too.

They lived not only in ages past,
There are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
For the saints of God are folk just like me,
And I mean to be one too.

NOTICES:

OFFERING & DEDICATION:

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

We are people of all ages who enter this space bringing our joys and concerns.
Joys and Concerns shared

Focused Thoughts: We are mindful of those for whom we pray.

Listening Response:

In the light and beauty of day

We give thanks in awe and wonder.

In the dark and stillness of night

We dream of healing and hope.

For ourselves, for those named or remembered, and in solidarity with those who have not the freedom to express their concern for fear of discrimination or condemnation.

In all our joys and in all our concerns, may we be ever mindful of the presence of the sacred among us, and to see the new possibilities of the now.

THE COMMUNION

In the beginning, O God, there was only you. We lived with you, walked with you, and your presence was like the light of a thousand suns blazing. Yet we turned away from that light and walked into the dark. We hid from the fire of your glory. Our eyes were blinded by your brightness. Even so, you did not turn from us. You gave us the promise of a new light, the hope of our reconciliation. You promised us your Son.

We await the fulfillment of your promise. We look into the dark, our eyes unaccustomed to your radiance, and we see an ember burning. Renew our eyes. Send us your light, O God.

In the beginning, O God, there was only you. And you moved to save us from our blindness, to lead us from our dark wanderings, and to bring us back into the light of your day. Little by little you have revealed your light. Little by little you have accustomed us to the coming fire. Through Sara and Abraham, through Jacob and Isaac, through Moses and David, through Mary and Joseph, you have slowly uncovered the ember of our hope still burning. You have revealed to us Christ Jesus.

We have walked with Sara.

We have walked with Abraham and all your prophets.

We have tried to open our eyes to the light.

Help us to see again.

Help us to endure the light of your presence.

Send us your light, our hope and our salvation.

Send us your Son. Send us Jesus.

In the beginning, O God, there was only you: Creator, Word and Breath. And from that beginning we see our birth. From that beginning we see our salvation. From that beginning we see our source of life.

Come our God. Come to us now.

For the promise of our salvation, the ember of life still burning, is Christ who comes as one of us, who comes to save us, who comes to lead us into the light.

In the night in which he was betrayed Jesus took the bread, and gave thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant which is in my blood. Do this in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

**Through God and with God and in God is all glory and honour,
all life and light, now and forever. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer –

Communion

Prayer after Communion

HYMN: TIS 417

1. **Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be —
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**
2. **Like a mother you enfold me,
hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.**
3. **Friend and lover, in your closeness
I am known and held and blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.**
4. **Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be —
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**

Shirley Erena Murray. Hope Publishing Co.

BENEDICTION:

Let us go in faith to ponder in our hearts
the mystery and the wonder of this season...

And now we take our leave.

**Before we gather here again:
may each of us bring happiness into another's life;
may we each be surprised by the gifts that surround us;
may each of us be enlivened by constant curiosity.
And may we remain together in spirit until the hour we
meet again.**

B Cheatham

WORDS OF BLESSING

May the God who dances in creation,
who embraces us with human love,
who shakes our lives like thunder,
bless us and drive us out with power
to fill the world with her justice.

Amen

**TIS 779: May the feet of God walk with you,
and God's` hand hold you tight,
May the eye of God rest on you,
and God's ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and God's breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and God's love bring you home.**

Aubrey Podlich 1946–

**TIS 778: Shalom to you now,
shalom my friends.
May God's full mercies
bless you my friends.
In all your living
and through your loving;
Christ be your shalom.
Christ be your shalom.**

Elise Shoemaker Eslinger 1942–