

February 12, 2017 Epiphany 6C Luke 7:18-35 "Wisdom's Children?"

John strides out of the wilderness where he has been living on locusts and wild honey. He carries with him a word of repentance, a ritual of baptism, and the promise of sins forgiven. Honesty and humility of spirit, it seems, are the prerequisite for entering into renewal God's grace, as are compassion and a generosity of heart and mind. The power of John's words and actions stirs the hopes of the people, causing them to wonder and to finally ask the question on all their minds: "Are you the One?" "Are you the One we have been waiting for?"

John swears he is not, "There will be another who will come after me-- one whose sandals I am unworthy to untie" (... remember what I said about humility?) This One, declares John, will baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit.

Afterwards, John is imprisoned, and Jesus, freshly baptized by John and clarified by a 40 day wilderness tour of his own, strides out of the wilderness into the Galilee and Judea teaching and preaching, healing and delivering--and eating and drinking with saints and sinners alike. The blind see, the lame walk, the ears of the deaf are opened. "Blessed are those who do not stumble because of me."

John, from his prison cell, hears word of Jesus' activities and words and sends emissaries to ask the question now burning in his heart and mind, "Are you the One? Are you the One we've been waiting for?"

Jesus points to the signs, the fulfillment of ancient prophecies of One who will come to bring close the Kingdom of God. I imagine John, in that dank dark cell rejoicing-- his spirit echoing that of Old Simeon in the temple as he lifts the baby Jesus in his arms: "Now, O Lord, dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." John too has been faithful. He has done his work. He has prepared the way. The One whom Israel has awaited has come.

Still, today God's work, is not finished. As we read the gospels, as our hearts are stirred, we might find ourselves asking, "Are you the One to come?" Are you the one who will walk with the poor and the refugee, and show us how to feed the hungry-- welcome the stranger? Are you the one who will sit with the forgotten, the lonely, the grieving, and remind us how to be still, speaking words of compassion in a world in short supply of such gifts? Are you the one who will open the scriptures and meet us there, where we sit in silence and listen? Are you the one who still sows seeds of God's reign, plants words of peace, plough the hardened ground of our hearts readying them for renewal, and sow the seeds of compassion for harvest? Are you the one who will take bread and break it and ask us to eat, to pour wine and bless it and ask us to drink?

In his book, *Fishing Tips*, John Pentland tells the story of a burly bearded homeless man he meets on the front steps of his church one morning. He invites him into the church kitchen, grabs a lasagna out of the frig, (there's always food at the ready at Hillhurst United). He cuts a hefty slice and warms it in the microwave. He leaves the man, whose name he now knows, "You're going to leave me here alone?" and returns a short time later—the lasagna eaten, the dishes washed, and Steve huddled over the radiator, warming himself, weeping.

"I came over to the radiator to get warm," he said, "but then I heard the children playing downstairs." Pentland writes, "I too could hear the sound of children's voices and laughter." Quietly Steve said, "I remember when I was a kid. I didn't worry about anything. I didn't think about whether I had a place to sleep at night or being warm..."

Are you the One, or are you also waiting for another? Are you waiting for me? Are you waiting for us? Is it up to us now to offer the signs of your Reign breaking in? If so, won't you please show us the way?

Reflective Prayer

Jesus,

Take us back to that first spark that lit our faith
and calls us to follow.

Take us back to the vision we had that connects us
to your Kingdom life.

Take us back to those persons
who spoke into us your love and grace.

Move us forward into what is yet to be,
with the gifts we have
and our longings for your Reign
to break through in our time and place.

Move us forward into tomorrow
with all of yesterday's love and hope.

Play the flute! We will dance.

Mourn! We will weep with you.

Move us forward, companion on the Way,
into the ways that lead to life--
that we might be wisdom's children—
both tender and strong for the sake of this
troubled and hope-filled world.

Amen.

Inspiration for this reflection and prayer came from **Spill the Beans** Worship and Learning Resources for all ages, Issue 21, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany.
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