

Thanksgiving - Reflections

October 8, 2017

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Scripture is our song for the journey,
the living word passed on from generation to generation
to guide and inspire.

Listen as the Spirit breathes revelatory power into
the words of scripture we hear this day.

Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT

Exodus 16:1-3

¹⁶ The whole Israelite community set out from E'lim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between E'lim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

REFLECTION

The Cost of Freedom

In the Celtic tradition, it is said that the light of God shines through creation—through sun, moon and stars; through desert, forest, and glen, through guppy, cow, and crow. Perhaps, nowhere does the light of God shine brighter or purer than in the gaze shared between mother and infant as those early bonds of human love and trust are formed.

I wonder, if it is the light of that shared gaze within the deep memory of humanity that is from time to time, rekindled, so that it rises up in protest, when we witness the extinguishing of the light, and the breaking of trust between the peoples of the world.

Moses has been exiled from his people in Egypt. He has made a life for himself, created a family, but the truth is he has been living on the run. He has looked away, broken his gaze-- abandoned his people.

I wonder if the fire that burned in that desert bush without consuming it, and the voice that Moses heard speaking words of deep challenge, rekindled in him a deep inner longing to see his people, to again gaze into their eyes, and to witness them living in freedom. I wonder if it was in that longing love, that he found the courage to stand up to the Pharaoh of his day and say, "Let my people go!" I wonder if it was that same love that allowed him to stand his ground when his people began to indulge in that greatest of threats to freedom... looking back to times of captivity through rose-coloured glasses! "Sure, we were slaves, but hey! We at least had meat to eat!"

There are many things that hold us captive, as humans, but perhaps none so powerful as the lies we tell ourselves when we face the difficult challenges of living out of God's liberating love for the world.

Well, I won't back down
No, I won't back down
You can sand me up at the gates of hell
But I won't back down.

No I'll stand my ground
Won't be turned around
And I'll keep this world from draggin' me down
Gonna Stand my ground.

And I won't back down
(I won't back down)
Hey, baby, there aint no easy way out
(I won't back down)
Hey, I will stand my ground
And I won't back down.

OLD TESTAMENT*Exodus 16:4-8*

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions." ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ⁸ Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because God has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord."

REFLECTION*Grumbling*

The Cost of freedom is high. Not only is there the command not to look back with longing for the days of our captivity, there is also the command to look forward with hope... with confidence even... when we know full well that life holds no guarantees for any of us! But I love God's response to Moses and the people. "Well, if they are going blame you, I'm going to show them just who they are really dealing with! I'm going to feed them! And they are going to have to learn to trust me--day by day, and night by night. They will gather only what they need for the day, "give us this day our daily bread," except on Fridays, when they can gather for Saturday as well. They can gather for the seventh day, the Sabbath day, for on that day they are to rest, and remember and know that I am God! "

The lives of the people are to cycle around the Seventh day of rest, of worship, of relationship. There is to be a sacred rhythm to their days. And, it is in this pattern that they will find life. Are you listening? Are you able to let go of one day a week and rest in, and trust in God's provision? Are you willing to trust God with the world, just one day a week?

If Abraham was the Father of Israel as she was being formed into a people, Moses was the Shaper of Israel, as under his leadership they were to be transformed into God's covenant people.

Their 40 years of dessert wandering, signal the years during which they began to know God, and to understand what it means to live as God's people. Those were the years, during which they began to be transformed into a people whose life together was to be reshaped through a law, and strengthened through a covenant between them and the God of creation. Those were the years through which they would grow into a particular kind of relationship with one another, and with Yahweh, their God. Those were the years, when they were challenged to become as, "A Light to the nations for the Glory of God!"

This work of forming and transforming our lives as a people of faith, both in relationship with one another and with our God, still continues in our lives and in our life together as community. It is a work that always unfinished—a work that is continuously unfolding.

That is why we often refer to the life of faith as a journey. None of us arrives fully formed in faith or in relationship; rather we travel through our lives in stages, often learning and growing by a series of fits and starts, stops and reversals, and re-starts. Sometimes we lose our way—and always we are called to return to the loving gaze of the God who holds us in loving embrace, and creates and sustains our lives. Always, we, like our ancient ancestors in faith, are called to let our light of God shine through our lives, and relationships so that others might see and give praise to the God who continually woos the world into healing and wholeness.

Well, I know what's right
I got just one life
In a world that keeps on pushin' me around
But I'll stand my ground

And I won't back down
(I won't back down).....

OLD TESTAMENT*Exodus 16:9-15*

⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'"

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The Lord said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.”

REFLECTION

Bread

One of the deep challenges in our lives is to know and choose the bread that truly nourishes us body and soul so that we might be light in the world. There is an incident in the gospels when Jesus has been sitting at a well in Samaria, speaking with a Samaritan woman. The disciples return from purchasing food saying, “Rabbi, eat!” But he says to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” The disciples give one another a startled look. They ask one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” (The unspoken question being: “Is Jesus now eating with Samaritans?”) Jesus tells them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white unto harvest.” (John 4:31-35)

This past week, my son Aaron called me from Atlanta, saying, “There is doom and gloom everywhere--hurricanes, and floods, mass murders... there seems to be no end to it! Now, Hurricane Nate is on the way!” And it is true, there has been much to report--as in recent days extreme disasters are occurring, not just in far away Syria, Africa, or Myanmar, but closer to home—especially for our brothers and sisters in the United States. Of course there are always places of deep pain, heartache, division, and destruction in the world. And it is in precisely in those places that we, as a people of faith, are called to shine the light of God, and to pray, think, and act with compassion.

Still it is easy, in such times, to give up in despair; to get busy, turning our gaze to other things; or get high, saying, “Let’s eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!” When we hear those inner voices speaking, we know we are not hearing the voice of the God who has come to us through the witness of Jesus who declares, “I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Tom came up to me this week, sounding very much like my son, embattled and heartbroken by all the heartbreaking news we’ve been hearing. But, something had risen up in him in the form of the song he has been weaving through our reflections. Spirit rose up in him with determination, and with the will to witness in the way he does best, which, I dare say, is the bread God gives to him, and through him, also to us. Music, so often is the bread we, as human beings are given to eat, that we might be inspired and strengthened in the face of adversity, and enabled to act with generosity, kindness, and yes, even thanks-giving --even in the face of death and devastation. We can be thankful even in difficult times, because we have been given the message of hope wrapped up in the always-present promise of resurrection and new life.

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But I won't back down.

No I'll stand my ground
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And I'll keep this world from draggin' me down
Gonna Stand my ground.

And I won't back down.....

GOSPEL READING

John 6:32-35

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶