

Mar 19, 2023

Pr. Steve

Texts:

We were only waiting for this moment to arrive...we were only waiting for this moment to arise.

I've been thinking about trees all week...and realized I had many incredible trees in my life, but never recognized how many. There was the climbing tree of my youth--lots of us had that. To crawl into it was to be inside and outside at the same time, soaking in the sunshine, swaying in the breeze, just...there was nothing like it.

I remember a birch forest--to this day it's just mystical and magical in my life, decades ago.

Elias, my son, showed me the largest larch tree in the whole of North America. (Of course, it's in Montana!)

Bev and I have seen Bo trees, not the one Buddha sat under, but we've seen them—you know, where the way their roots hang down the limbs--creating these beautiful little temples.

I was taken to see (along with Libby) the largest tree in the whole Southern hemisphere of the planet. We had to drive two-and-one-half hours one way just to get there. (Our [South African] Partnership friends brought us.) It is a Baobab tree 700-800 years old, roots 25 kilometers long, going out in every direction. You have to climb up at least 15 feet and then you drop to the part of the tree on the inside where it's hollowed out and up to 18 people can live there—and we know this because, during the time of Apartheid, the ANC folks would hide there. Incredible. Incredible.

In the Amazon, trees have large fans coming down, V-shaped, they'll have two or three of them,... starting over my head, all the way to the ground. It's really important that you know this, because if you get lost in the Amazon jungle, you have to pick up a big stick...and strike this fan at the base of the tree as hard as you can. And it will reverberate, so hopefully, someone might hear you and find you. Remember that when you're in the Amazon! Life-saving.

When Bev and I were in Jerusalem, we went to *Yad Vashem*, the Holocaust Museum. It's overwhelming. And when you finally emerge, hours later, you step out into this open verandah—there's a big triangle there. People just naturally walk over to the edge and all there is for you to gaze on is a hillside of trees. And that's where you start to absorb or recover everything you've seen. Walk around the grounds, you come to The Avenue of the Righteous, where trees have been planted in honor of the Gentiles who assisted the Jews in World War II, underground, escaping, hiding, whatever. The Garden of the Righteous, that's where they are. Plant a tree.

And of course, our magnificent redwoods—nothing like them on the planet. That's why I retreat there every year on the Lost Coast (Redwoods Monastery)—the old grove sanctuary forest, these trees, some over a thousand, some over two thousand years old. In 1996, there were only 6% of

the 'old growth' redwood trees left. I said to myself, "Surely this must stop now!" Today there are only 4% remaining!

That picture on the Bulletin cover--I go inside that tree every year, and pray and meditate there—and I'm not going to tell you where it is! It's a cathedral experience, and a profound stillness. Stillness and quiet—we can't get too much, right? The endless silence...

What does it take for us to feel the soulfulness of trees? What does it take to feel a relationship with them? What does it take to stir the awareness within us of their dignity, a dignity so profound that, when in their presence, we feel our own dignity. 'I will not live with less dignity than any one of these trees.' And the tree feels the same way. They do nothing, but simply bless life.

When Jesus saw the blind man (that's the Gospel). He saw him. But his disciples immediately asked, '*Whose fault is this—his or his parents?*' because human beings like to know who to blame—because once you know who to blame, then it's clear, '*I'm not responsible! Somebody else's fault...*' *Ahhh. Somebody did something wrong here.*' We're cruel, unbelievably cruel!

Jesus ignores his disciples, spits on the earth, makes a paste of mud, daubs it on his eyes, makes it even darker. The blind man is thrilled. His friends say, 'Is that him or no?' The authorities say, 'Who did this? What's going on here?' They grill him. He says, 'I don't know.' They ask his parents, 'Tell the truth! What's going on? It's your son.' They say, 'He's an adult. He can speak for himself.'

They come back to the blind man. 'It's illegal you know—healing on the Sabbath. Who's in charge here?' The blind man says, 'All I know is I was blind; now I can see.'

Isn't that what we want for every human being on the planet? ... To come out of our blindness and see. To be a light for each other, just to see what's going on. And Jesus came for clear discernment--so that the blind may see, and those who claim to see will recognize how blind they are.... Perhaps you can think of some people in that category.

Meditation today is to open our eyes.

Sr. Joan Chittister said, "Religion is not rituals, morals, systems of thought, ethics. All these are good, but they are incomplete. Spiritual life and practice is about coming to the consciousness and awareness of the sacred--the sacred which isn't seen but permeates everyone. When that consciousness arises, we receive fresh perspectives, new insights...and the blind see. It takes peace and wholeness."

Even in the heart of darkness we begin to see the trees, ourselves, others, relationships and possibilities. We even get to see the cross, which is so blinding, hideous, hidden, and yet the pivotal turning point of mercy--a real tree of life.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.