

Oct 31, 2021 Reformation Sunday

In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

"You will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [John 8: 32]

We live in a time of 'Truth Decay'--and it's bad...

Now, the great Reformation Movement, we celebrate today, of 500 years ago had a huge impact on its times, not just in religion, and in church. Theological profound insights, yes, but women were to be educated now, children were to be educated--it had economic impacts, cultural impacts, political impacts. The Reformation divided northern and southern Europe, and many credit the Reformation as being the impetus for the rebirth of democracy on the planet. You see, it wasn't just religious.

Another great sign of transformation is what's called the Axial Age. From about six, seven hundred years BCE, these great prophets and philosophers grew up around the world, starting with the prophets, like Jeremiah in Israel, Buddha in India, Socrates in Greece, Lao Tzu in China, Jesus in Israel, utterly profound, and their teachings have impacted people until this day-- the Axial Age.

But we're living in a time now where we feel overwhelmed by crises, don't we? We wonder if there is a future. How will we go on? Because it's draining us. It's defeating us. We're not sure there is a future. We feel like we're trying to kill one gnat at a time in a swarm, right? What's next? We can't go on like this.

And that's why what we need is a new vision--a new vision for our humanity that will take us to places we've never been before. Are you ready?

We need the energy that accompanies it. That's always a sign of new life. Look at anything that these days is out and about and around us that is dampening you. There's no life in it. And you know what? Look instead for those things which are giving you energy. The very word enthusiasm comes from two Greek words: *en* *thous*. To be in God is to be enthusiastic. Did you know that? That's what our faith is about. Where is that stirring among us?

For the last couple of weeks we have been talking about a number of themes or elements, which are bringing us signs of hope. Healing into wholeness we talked about, yes? Wholeness where we feel alive and vital. That sign of the presence of God.

And who can deny wholeness to anybody else? If I'm feeling whole and great, why would I deny you? In fact, what we do is mutually encourage. Yes, we want our friends to be whole. We want our children to be whole. We want our society to be whole. We want our church to be whole. We want the earth to be whole and revitalized. We've got a future. How about that? Yes, we do!

We talked about moving from reactive mind to receptive mind. Remember that? Reactive mind is like living inside of a pinball machine. Ping, ping, ping, ping, in every direction, right? That's why we're so exhausted. Receptive mind has contemplative practices around it, which bring us a sense of calm. And so, all of the contradictions of life can begin to settle in. You know, they aren't solved necessarily, but they're held with a calm which allows some clarity to arise. We need calm, clear, wise people today. It's a huge contribution to the future. Won't you please participate?

We've spoken about evolution and that we are a part of it. This is a really big deal. You see, evolution is not happening outside of us--we're not outside observers looking in: *'Look, another 22 species died this year. That's terrible!'* No, no. no. We are part of it.

The very pulse, and impulse of life is Christ's compassion, that Word who gave birth through the Big Bang to the universe. Whoosh. And we are the cutting edge of evolution, because we're conscious, and that means we get to choose. Shall we become responsible? Shall we make choices that enact caring in the world? These are choices to be made. We don't just sit back and hope God does something. We're called to participate.

Truth Decay, part 2.

Some centuries ago (and I regret I don't recall which one precisely) but in ancient China, medical doctors only got paid when the patients were healthy. Do you like that? Do you get that?

If you're the medical doctor, and I'm your patient, what do you want from me? To be as healthy as I can possibly be all the time, because when I get sick, you don't get paid. So the doctors are constantly trying to encourage the best in each of us: do preventative medicine; exercise; get out there; become wise; spend time with your grandchildren...

Wow, isn't that brilliant? Could we organize the society around that principle? What would it mean to start moving in that direction? Take that one to heart.

And, Truth Decay, part 3.

The greatest sin that the institutional Church and the Western world committed is the unmitigated arrogance toward the rest of the human race. At the core of our faith is the mystery of the Incarnation, which says that the very word of God, this infinite, compassionate, creative, dynamic has become human, has become flesh. Not only in Christ, but in us, that's the point. In us. Here is Christ's abode. And not only us--but in all of us human beings. This is the temple of God. All of us.

And the tragedy of the missionary movement (my grandfather was a missionary, I still liked and loved the guy) but the tragedy of the missionary movement over centuries was not that they took Christ to other folks. It's that they failed to recognize Christ in the people they met.

Do we really think that Hindus and Buddhists and Taoists and Aztecs and Incas were devoid of God? And we conquered those people because we did not recognize them as our equals. That's horrific. It's why we're in this disastrous place.

Now in the earliest days of the church--what are called the Church Fathers: Justin, Clement, Origen--these people spoke and wrote about Socrates and Heraclitus, as 'precursors of Christ'. They didn't try to impose Jewish standards on the Greek world. They abandon those standards because they are just forms. *'We're trying to deal and teach and be with these people, in a new context.'*

Unfortunately, by the Middle Ages, we were imposing Christ on other people, and imposing European values along with it--because we refused to recognize brothers and sisters as equals. Therefore, with indigenous peoples and tribes, with African peoples and tribes, we didn't listen. We had no interest.

In fact, some of our ancestors were debating, *'Are they even rational creatures?'* Have you seen those medical studies? *'They may be pre-human. Maybe they're subhuman.'* These studies were very serious. And this is what justified slavery, because *'they're not one of us, are they?'*

The truth of Christ is never imposed. It is always shared. So here's, I hope, a kind of fun alternative for us to enjoy and consider.

Back in 1985, I returned to India, in the south near a town called Trichinopoly, and spent a month at the Saccidananda Ashram. The guru there was Bede Griffiths, who was actually brought to the faith by C.S. Lewis, but that's another story. I'll tell it to you later.

And because it's India, everyone is invited to the ashram: Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Sufis, Bahais. I mean everybody was there. It's just incredible, huh? This has been the tradition of India for thousands of years.

So our day would begin by going out to the Kaveri River right on the banks, which is the sacred river of the South. (The Ganges in the North—the Kaveri in the South.) We spent an hour meditating there from about five in the morning till six. Then we come to the temple, which had sacred cows and elephants on the rooftop, and all these multiple colors and birds, and we'd go inside for morning Mass. We didn't sing any hymns--we were chanting OM and in Sanskrit to the drone sound of India for long periods of time, preparing for the Eucharist. The Eucharist itself was a warm piece of chapati about the size of a tortilla, rich and good and honey-soaked. And then, the Eucharist was offered to all. And most of the friends of other traditions would participate in the Eucharist. Some did not. They felt [abstaining] was the best way to honor this sacred mystery of God.

I spent a month there and it enriched me. And it brought me to a comfort zone where I finally understood that Interfaith work is not optional. It is a reforming necessity. And I was blessed to come home and find open-minded people here, too. Whew! What a blessing! What a mystery! I don't know all the answers. I don't know what it all means. I do know in this coming together that that is always, always, a sign of the Gospel: where no one is denied, where all are invited to the table.

Because God speaks in so many different ways. God speaks in the burning bush of Sinai and in the cosmic events we don't even know about in the billions of galaxies. God speaks in children, and in our own heart.

And God especially speaks these days in the voices of strangers.
And God bless the strangers who are displaced--because nobody else will: the immigrants, and the refugees, and the children on the border. *'God help them because they are disturbing our complacency and we don't have time for that.'*

What you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you are doing to me.
[Matt 25:40]

And God speaks in the unpredictability of the Holy Spirit who is forever on the move, blowing like the wind, we know not where. And if reform movements of the past have been stirred up, and the Axial Age stirred up, seemingly coming from nowhere, why should we not be stirred up for this time? It is for this time, perhaps friends, that we have been born--to bring hope, to bring transformation, to bring change, and to bring healing into wholeness, which we need.

Truth Decay is not permanent.

If you make my word your home, you will know the truth. And that truth will set you free. [John 8:32]

Amen.

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