

December 5, 2021 Second Sunday of Advent

Pr. Steve

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

*In the tender compassion of our God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace. [Lk 1: 78-79]*

Rumi said,

*Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.
Keep walking. Don't try to see through the distances.
Don't try to see beyond the horizon.
That's not for human beings.*

*Move, but move within.
Don't move the way fear makes you move.
Move from within.*

Let the beauty we love be what we do.

Excerpt, 'Keep Walking'--Rumi

Our friend, Richard Caemmerer--the artist who designed Peace--back in the days of his youth went to Japan to study art with a "Living Treasure". Now, they have this tradition in Japan of recognizing 100 people whose gifts have been so profound in all kinds of fields--science, art, spirituality-- that these people are recognized and given a lifetime stipend. Can you believe it?

So Richard went to study with a Living Treasure. There was one other Japanese student with him, and they literally went walking around the countryside of Japan. They'd come to a farmhouse, and meet the farmer and the wife, and share a little scroll, which says '*This is a Living Treasure*', and people were honored to provide hospitality for a Living Treasure.

Usually, they stayed in the barn, set up a little shop, would sleep there. The next day they would go out to field, somewhere, to take in the scenery, the landscape. And they would sit down for four hours, gazing on the scene, and then they go back to the barn, and have to paint it in 10 minutes or less! And if you couldn't paint it in 10 minutes or less, you had to go back for another two hours, to sit there and gaze, and take it in, because you, obviously, haven't seen it.

How well do we see? How well do we see ourselves or each other? Or what really needs to be done?

The Holy Trinity for our society is Speed, Efficiency, Deliverables.
Can I get an Amen? Faster and faster. Terribly shallow, isn't it?
Narrow, dangerous.

The Babylonians were the first civilization to create highways (Phil will correct me if I'm wrong). And the purpose of the highway--leveling the hills, building up the valleys--was to create these great expanses so that you can look into the distance and observe processions coming, processions of conquered captives, now to be our slaves. ...They were highways of humiliation.

And Isaiah, which John the Baptist picks up, was daring enough to take that hideous image, and invert it to one of hope: *This shall become a highway for our God who will bring Salvation*, (which literally means Liberation), to all of humanity. Incredible.

Now, can you imagine being a Hebrew slave in Babylon for close to 50 years, and getting this word: *'We shall be set free!'*?

How would you hear that word?

Really? Us?

You mean things could change? There might be hope?

Would you trust such a word? Would you risk your life on it? What a vision!

What shall we build and create our future upon?

It's time for some changes, isn't it? And what will be those elements, those dynamics, which are going to shape the future that we want--for our time, our lives, our families, the future?

Is technology our only hope? And, just for the record--we designed the phones, we designed the computers, we designed Hubble telescope. Why are we so impressed with the products? Help me with that, would you, please. It's amazing stuff, but they're all tools. They're just tools. They don't have the answers.

What shall we build and create our future upon?

We've been blessed with life. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Every human being wants wholeness, every one of us, no matter how hurt, broken, broken-hearted, wounded, damaged. We all want to become whole. And it is the blessing of life that moves and encourages us towards wholeness once again.

Blessings are not affirmations. Blessings summon the souls of friends, the soulfulness they

need to face change, transformation, possibility. Blessing encircles them with light to protect, to heal, to strengthen, to encourage. That's why we gather in worship--to encourage the beauty of life that we all long for, that desires to be birthed from within (though often we feel it is a great distance from us.)

It's why, Lars [Howlett] told us, we walk the Labyrinth. Our feet meander around this winding path, the destination... unknown. We don't have scripts for our lives, do we? We don't know the outcome. We wander this path until we come to the center of ourselves--and the universe. And many of us have experienced this at the center of the labyrinth, where there's this simple stillness and calm. Maybe a little clarity. A connection with life. And it's possible that life might be possible.

Is it possible, my friends, that the most valuable gift and resources that we need for our time are within us already? Within us, here, is the clarity, charity, the wisdom we need. It's not out there. You see our society is all about externalizing, isn't it? We're always trying to organize and strategize the whole world around us, that will make us safe if we just put it all in order. That's why we love ducks in order. *'Please ducks, organize yourselves so I can have a peaceful life.'* Nah, it's in here. The way forward is the way inward. And we must start paying attention more deeply, because this is what's creating our wisdom for the future.

Thich Nhat Hahn is a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist, [whom] some would consider a realized Buddha. Martin Luther King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Back in the early 80s, the disarmament movement was very, very big in Europe. And here in the States, a huge demonstration was getting organized in New York City. They knew there'd be over 100,000 people participating. And the organizers asked Nhat Hahn to participate and he said, 'No.' So they asked a second and a third time, 'Would you please participate?' and he said, 'No.' 'Well, what would it take to get you to participate with us?' He said, 'I'd like to walk in the way in which I'd like to walk.' They said, 'Okay.'

There is a hundred thousand people and his contingent's in the middle of it, a few monks, friends, some children. They're all holding hands and they're walking like this--[Pr. Steve demonstrates slow walking] Can you imagine the response from the rest of the crowd, from the peaceniks? *'What's going on up there? Move it. We're trying to get to the end. Kick it into gear!'* Finally, people started walking around them, right? Angry, looking back with dirty looks--*'What is wrong with you people?'* And what do they see? Because Nhat Hahn wrote a book of poetry later entitled, *'Peace is Every Step.'*

If it's not emanating from your heart, it won't be permeating our world.

*In the tender compassion of our God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,*

*to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

I conclude with this prayer from Thomas Merton.

*My Lord, I have no idea where I'm going.
I don't see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I actually am doing so.
But I believe the desire to please you, in fact, does please you
and I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I know that you will guide me on the wise path, though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always.
Though I may seem to be lost in the shadow of death I will not fear,
for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
Amen.*

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