

6-13-2021 3rd Sunday of Pentecost

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Let us pray.

Source and giver of all life we offer our gratitude for all that is for all you've given us for all that we have learned and we pray that the spirit of openness will continue to lead our hearts to welcoming your Spirit who is ever on the move, and recreating us in the image and imagining of your life. We pray in Christ's name.

Welcome friends, to the season of Pentecost, the longest Church Season of the year, usually signified by the color green.

Our first text today is from **Ezekiel, chapter 17**.

This is a poetic rendering of this text. Being such pragmatic people, we hone in on keeping our feet on the ground, and that is very important. But there are times to release ourselves into the majestic vastness of God, which this text offers us this morning.

### **The Eagle and the Vine**

"Mortal one, a parable --  
a great sky-ranging bird,  
surpassing in beauty and majesty -- his wings owned the heavens,  
his shadow lay large on the land.

One day the eagle flew and flew,  
far, far as the horizon, beyond --  
finally, wings folding,  
he descended,  
came to rest in the swaying summit  
of a gigantic cedar.

There he stood, majestic.  
It was as though  
he held a levee on that throne.

His gaze ranged the horizon,  
the look of an emperor of upper air.

After a long time,  
off again he flew  
far O far --  
straight into the eye of night.

He took soundings from the stars,  
then like an arrow from on high,  
shot to earth.

Cannily, exactly, easefully,  
as though darkness were high noon,  
he plucked a young vine,  
root and all, from its ground.  
Carefully, tenderly,  
the slight burden  
he bore homeward.

Toward dawn,  
heavy, weary,  
he came to rest,  
by dint of beak and claw,  
planted the slender cutting in new soil.

How the vine flourished!  
Leaves, harvest  
yearning upward  
toward his majesty,  
ranging the skies,  
hovering nearby,  
guarding, surveying, keeping watch.' (17: 1 - 6)

This is the magnificence of our God, permeating and blessing the entire universe with compassion. And yet our response is given in the second portion of the poem of Ezekiel 17.

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Yahweh: "Mortal one, mortal one, tell of that cedar tree  
which in my parable enthroned the eagle.

Tell my purpose.

Despite all, despite all! ---

The topmost branch,  
which sovereign Aquila  
graced with his presence --  
I will pluck it away.

Yes, that very branch.

I shall take wing like an eagle, from end  
to end of the earth,

I bear the cedar bough,  
plant it anew --  
under my provenance  
how it shall flourish!

Tell them, mortals, tell them of greatness to come!

High, unsurpassed,  
that pillar of heaven,  
a haven for all the birds of creation!

My tree, loud with birdsong,  
a rainbow of light --  
itself a splendid  
bird of paradise!" (17: 22 - 24)

In the second portion, we look at the wonders of creation, and how they  
have been distorted.

The sublime eagle wearies, at times grows furious, and the C ???

We and our tainted lineage, what is to be done with us? The gift of life  
given us from the beginning, the mighty experiment of Genesis,  
and it would seem at times, it's become a plain disaster. By day, and year,  
and generation and eons, individuals, cultures, and nations take up a vile  
and ever-worsening burden, that deepens and widens the scope of moral  
catastrophe. We live as if there will never be any moral reckoning.

And yet, and yet despite all, there is no giving up on us, no condemnation  
by God. Taking counsel with a heavy heart, and refusing to ignore, as one

poet said, 'our bloodshot biography'. Nonetheless, God's holiness will not be held hostage to wickedness.

It is not for us, dear friends, as much as we desire, it is not for us to dictate the beat and the pace of God's merciful heart. Not for us, we who so often proved ourselves destitute of virtue, inept, morally insipid. It is not for us to set the scope of mercy. Despite all, despite all that pollutes our hearts and contaminates our spirits, despite all, God will be God.

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The second lesson for today is from 2 Corinthians, the conclusion of **chapter 5**. [2 Cor. 5: 14-19]

*For the love of Christ overwhelms us when we consider that if one man died for all, then all have died. His purpose in dying for humanity was so that those who live should live no longer just for themselves, but live for him who died and who was raised to life. From now onwards, then, we will not consider anyone by human standards. Even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer. So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old order is gone, a new being is there to see.*

*It is all God's work. He reconciled us to himself through Christ, and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He gave it to us. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

This passage is so astounding in its liberating spirit. We heard on Pentecost of the Spirit, who's constantly on the move, like the wind and the breeze, like the evolving labyrinth. Always on the move--to birth reconciliation, among all of us, and all of humanity. It is a new creation being birthed in, with, and through us, too. Paul says a little bit later, '*If there is no new creation, then forget Christianity; you don't need it.*' ...That's from the Bible!

[Gary plays and sings Alleluia.]

The Gospel for today is from **Mark, chapter 4.**

*Jesus said, This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake. The seed is sprouting and growing--how he does not know. Of its own accord, the land produces, first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once, he starts to reap because the harvest has come.*

*He also said, What can we say the reign of God is like? What parallel can we find for it?*

*It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing is the smallest of all the seeds on Earth.*

*Yet, once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all, and puts out branches. So that even the birds of the air, can find shelter in its shade.*

*Using parables like this, he spoke to them so far as they were capable of understanding.*

*He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to the disciples when they were together.*

The word of God. Praise to you. O Christ.

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

Jesus brings new dimensions to spiritual life and practice.

Not a religion based on externals or behavior modification, but a revelation of God, who is love. Jesus is the moving path on the way to God. This reign of God is gradually emerging as today's parables say.

The reign of God is like a seed, sown without notice.

One that springs--a surprise. For the reign of God is like a mustard seed or redwood tree, deceptively tiny, but growing into a great height and expanse. And this reign is also a dynamic process. One unfolding process, Jesus, embodying, this revelation of love, and we living this resurrecting and reconciling love into reality, in our time. The new creation has begun and we are a part of it, and its evolution and our commitments, make it real.

Religion wants to package God by rules, obedience, morality codes.

Jesus relativizes all structures when they inhibit or prohibit love.  
'*Get them out of the way!*' This is why it said that religion killed Jesus.  
Not Judaism, but religion that is superficial.

And though Jesus' reign is not of this world, worldly powers ever since King Herod have feared Jesus, because he undercuts its claim to supremacy. So politics killed and kills Jesus too. But Jesus accepts, and nurtures, and returns the afflicted to the human community, just as Ezekiel understood.

In fact, traveling far beyond the veneer of religion, Jesus becomes the outcast. Grace becomes disgrace, [OR Disgrace becomes grace]??? and plants the seed of reconciling love within us, sowing a gradual and dynamic, new creation within the shell of the old.

Aren't we blessed? Amen.

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In our prayers for today, we include the following:

Ralph Reed, as he concludes his days among us, that he,  
Arlene, and family be consoled with the mercy and spirit of God.  
We pray for Drew and Dennis,  
For Karen and Doug,  
For Ed Klitsch, Dana, and Marshall, Doug Shuffield,  
John Dahlin, Stanley Ngesa,  
Bob Worthington, Brian Schultz, Kyle, Moriah,  
Maili, and Fei, Bob Mantei.  
We pray for the family of Alicia Bowling, who mourn her death.  
For Cory, and Diane, and Mary,  
For Jack and Ruth, José,  
For Lenny, Heather, and Grant.  
and Joanne Henry.  
God in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Hold us, O God, in the embrace of your grace which heals, and reconciles, and makes all whole and one again in your never-ending mercy. Expand our hearts to trust that we are growing ever so gradually in your love, upon which the whole universe depends.

We pray in the name of the dying, and rising, and resurrecting Christ.  
Amen.

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The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord's face shine upon you, and be  
gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor,  
and give you peace.

[The service concludes with Dr. Ellen Foster Randle singing "I'm Gonna Let  
it Shine"]