

## Reflections for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord ~ 09 January 2022

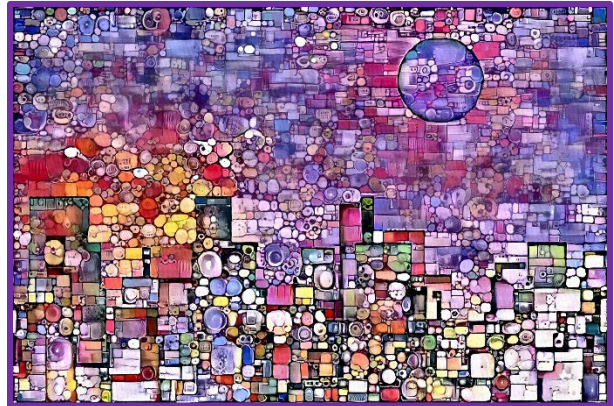
### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Here is your God! See, O Lord God, you come with might, and your arm rules for you. . . You will feed your flock like a shepherd; you will gather the lambs in your arms, and carry them in your bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep” (Is 40:9-11). Our first reading from the book of Isaiah sets the stage for the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus.



Listen again to this verse, “Here is your God. . . You come with might and your arm rules for you.” That is the image of God so many have of God, the Almighty One, the All-Powerful One. Yet the verse continues with the surprising description of this Almighty One, “You will feed your flock like a shepherd; you will gather the lambs in your arms, and carry them in your bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” The shepherd is the lowliest and the poorest of all people in the society. The shepherd carries the lambs but does not take them from the mother who is led gently along with the shepherd. The arm rules for the Mighty God, and the shepherd God holds the lambs in loving arms! The language of “feed,” “gather,” “lambs,” “bosom,” “gently lead,” and “mother sheep” are image of compassion, gentleness, relationship, and inclusion.

Psalms 104 seems to return us to the Almighty One who is “clothed with honour and majesty, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, who set the beams of chambers on the waters, makes the clouds a chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, makes the winds messengers, and fire and flame ministers” (Ps 104:1-4). But once again we are surprised and our understanding is deepened as we hear the last verse, “When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of Earth” (Ps 104:30). The images of sending forth, creating, renewing remind us that our God is life-giving, compassionate, and relational.



The writer of the letter of Titus echoes this same image of a loving and gentle God, “When the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to God’s mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:4-6). “Here is your God! See!” – a God who relates to us, who holds us in love and compassion, who carries us and leads us, who gathers us, who sends the spirit, who renews the face of Earth.

When we come to the Gospel story, we see Jesus’ first steps in his ministry, his living out of the life to which God has called him. These first steps are marked by the baptism. Now heaven and Earth, the divine and the human, will be brought together by water, by the Spirit, and by the word. Immediately we are brought back to these same images from the first verses of Genesis and the creation story as God becomes flesh in the cosmos, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,

while the *ruah* (the wind or the spirit) of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. . . And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters' (Gen 1:1-3, 6).

Water – essential to life, to energy, to growth, to refreshment, to cleansing – becomes the connection between Earth and heaven from the moment of creation of the cosmos to the moment of Jesus' awareness that he is God's presence among us in a new way. Water marks a crossing



place in the tradition of God's people – the people crossed over the Reed Sea on their way from slavery in Egypt and then again over the Jordan River on their way into the Promised Land. Jesus chooses to be baptized, to cross over into a new way of life, to transformation. Let us not forget that all water is holy, all water is God's gift of creation and of creating. Let us also not forget that we are stewards of water on

Earth. Are we faithful to caring for water so precious and so sacred?

The Spirit also connects heaven and Earth, appearing when the heavens open and hovering over Jesus in the form of a dove (an Earth creature, other-than-human). And, just as God's word brings the cosmos into being, the voice of the creating One speaks once more from heaven, now saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22). John the Baptist strengthens the sense of transformation by adding that Jesus' baptism will be of the Spirit and water and fire!

You and I share baptism with Jesus. Each one of us has had water poured over us, has been marked by the words, and has experienced the Spirit poured over us. Do we trust that like Jesus, God the creating One has said to us, "You are my Beloved, with you I am well pleased"? [Jan Richardson](#) allows God to speak in this simple, profound verse. We say it today with special memory of Sister Patricia Maher who entered eternal life on this day.

As if we could call you  
anything other than  
beloved  
and blessed  
drenched as we are  
in our love for you  
washed as we are  
by our delight in you  
born anew as we are  
by the grace that flows  
from the heart of the one  
who bore you to us.



It is telling in the Gospel story that Jesus was not baptized only into a personal relationship with his God. Luke says, "When all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was

praying.” Baptism is a sign and a way of inclusion and belonging – in community and with the sacred communion of all creation. Baptism marks our commitment to live in that community, in that sacred communion, every single day.



This feast of the Baptism marks the connection between the season of Christmas and ordinary time. It is in ordinary time that the transforming action of Baptism becomes real. It is in our everyday lives, in our ordinary actions, that baptism becomes real. Baptism is truly a reflection of God's ongoing creation in my life, in your life, in our lives. Our baptism did not occur at one moment in time, but it is lived out every moment in our living. We cannot remember our initial baptism; we do know how we live our baptism every day.

This week, take time to reflect on water in your life – water which you drink, which you use to wash, rain and snow pouring down your window, the river or ocean you gaze on. Take time to reflect on how you use words – to praise, to complain, to condemn, to build up, to create, to soothe. Take time to see the Spirit poured into your very being – the moments when you know for certain that God is present with you, the moments when you see God's goodness reflected in someone you live with or minister among, the moments when you see God's creating presence in trees or flowers or animals or insects. Water, word, Spirit – this is baptism lived every single day. Hear the creating One say to you, to those with whom you journey, to other Earth creatures around you, to Earth herself, “You are my Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

We have just left the Christmas season when the shepherds and the wise ones were filled with expectation, and their expectations were filled beyond imagining. Now let us continue into 2022 knowing that our expectations will be filled beyond imagining by our God who created and who creates us. The poet, [Scott Ressman](#), echoes this same message:

God of the waters. Water of birth,  
moving us from safety into the world.

God of the waters. Water of connection,  
engaging the playful Spirit, the passionate Christ, the challenging God.

God of the waters. Water of life,  
sustaining, quenching, cleansing.

God of the waters. Water of trouble,  
journeying us from here to there, from the known to the unknown.

God of the waters. Birth us. Connect us.  
Live in us. Trouble us.

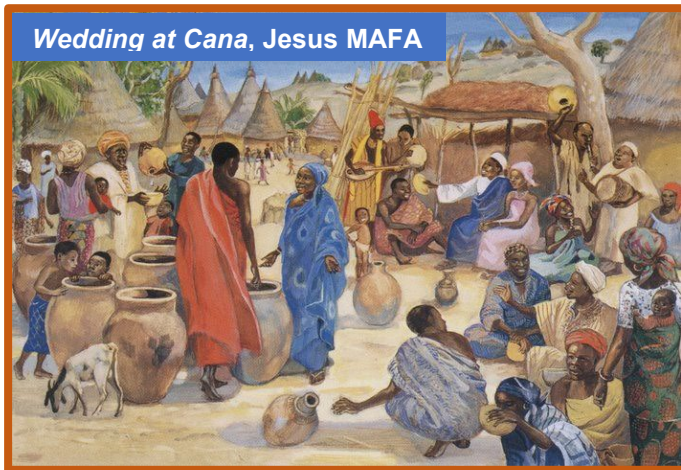
Let us live our baptism every day, trusting in the water, the word, and the Spirit!



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 16 January 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

We are now in Ordinary Time in the Church's liturgical year – a time when Jesus begins and carries out his public ministry leading eventually to his death and Resurrection. There are three transition moments to this Ordinary Time – the Epiphany when the Good News reaches out to the ends of Earth, the Baptism of Jesus when God declares, “You are my Son, the Beloved,” and today Jesus' first public sign at the wedding feast of Cana. All three transition moments focus on rejoicing and right relationships.



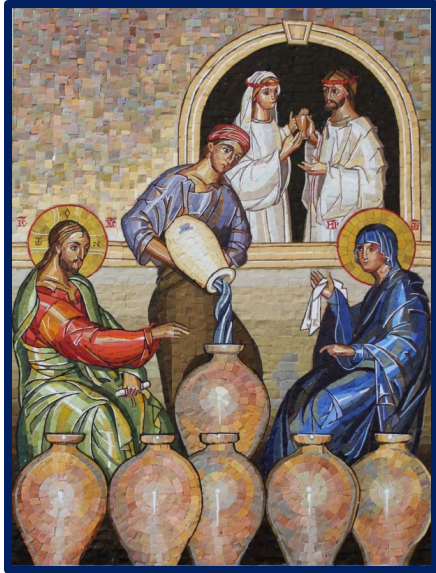
“I will not keep silent” – with these words spoken by God or by the prophet for God, our first reading from Isaiah begins. It comes as the people of Judah return from exile in Babylon. They see it as a sign of God's forgiveness for the wrong that they have done. The wonder of their restored relationship not only with their land but with their God is that God loves them so deeply, calls them “My Delight”! The prophet even uses the marriage metaphor to describe the intimacy of the relationship. The last words of the reading ring out, “So shall your God rejoice over you.”

That sense of right relationship, a new beginning and not keeping silent about it carries into Psalm 96 where Earth sings a new song to the Lord along with the families of all peoples and all nations. “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all Earth” (Ps 96:1).

The echoes of rejoicing, right relationships, and transition moments flow through the story of the wedding at Cana. In all four Gospels, Jesus' entry into public life begins with his Baptism by John and the calling of the disciples in Galilee. Mark follows with the healing of the man with the unclean spirit; Matthew with the temptation in the desert and the Sermon on the Mount; Luke with the teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. John also returns to Galilee for the calling of the disciples, but his first act of public ministry happens in Cana.

“I will not keep silent” could also begin this story of the wedding feast. Mary, who is attending the wedding with Jesus and his disciples, notices that there is no more wine. She not only notices but, in her compassion, chooses to do something about it. When she speaks to Jesus, he dismisses her, saying that his hour had not yet come. But she pays no attention and tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says. Jesus has no choice! He acts on his mother's direction. It is she who startles him into realizing that his hour had indeed come.





**Wedding at Cana, Modern Icon**

Jesus does not call Mary by name (nor does the Gospel writer). Rather Jesus calls her “Woman” (Jn 2:4). This is a most unusual way for a son to address his mother even in Jesus’ time. The only other time in John’s Gospel that Jesus will speak to her he will use the same title, “Woman, here is your son” (Jn 19:26) as he gives her into the care of the disciple whom he loved (also unnamed). This is intentional. Mary has a special role in Jesus’ public ministry as she does in his incarnation. She calls him into ministry at Cana – she calls him to carry out the first sign of many signs that will “reveal his glory” and lead him to the cross and Resurrection. She will be there at his death, marking the end of his public ministry, and his transition to his new risen life. Veronica Lawson rsm expresses it this way, “This ‘woman’ believes in him and invites the servants at the marriage feast to obey his word. While Jesus performs this first ‘sign’ that leads his disciples to faith, the role played by this faith-filled woman casts her in the role of ‘witness to the light’ and proclaimer of the Word that brings life.

The sign which Jesus works here is the turning of the water into wine, not just ordinary wine but the finest of wines! Wine is an important metaphor in Jesus’ time. Amos speaks of the day when “the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13). Isaiah speaks of the feast that God will prepare for all peoples, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines ... of well-aged wines strained clear” (Is 25:6). The abundance of fine wine is a symbol of the abundance of joy that awaits not only Israel, but all peoples on the day of God’s salvation.

In his first sign, Jesus shows us exactly what the people in Judah returning from exile had learned and what Earth has known since the creation of the cosmos – our God is a God who nourishes us with life-giving fruits of Earth, who loves us intimately, and who blesses us abundantly.

Pope Francis, during his trip to Chile in 2018, beautifully says what all of this means for us in our ordinary, everyday living:

Like Mary at Cana, let us make an effort to be more attentive in our squares and towns, to notice those whose lives have been “watered down,” who have lost—or have been robbed of—reasons for celebrating; those whose hearts are saddened. And let us not be afraid to raise our voices and say: “they have no wine.” The cry of the people of God, the cry of the poor, is a kind of prayer; it opens our hearts and teaches us to be attentive. Let us be attentive, then, to all situations of injustice and to new forms of exploitation that risk making so many of our brothers and sisters miss the joy of the party. And, like Mary, let us say: they have no wine, Lord.





Paul's first letter to the Corinthians tells us how to do what Pope Francis is challenging us to do. Paul reminds us that each one of us has gifts given by the Spirit, by the Lord, by God (1 Cor 12:6). These gifts vary, but each one matters. "All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Cor 12:11).

These gifts come to us in different ways even over the course of our own lives. When we were young children, we shared our gifts in ways that differ from how we shared our personal gifts when we were young adults or middle-aged or today. John tells us that there were six stone water jars at the wedding feast at Cana. In the Jewish tradition, the number for completeness is seven. The seventh water jar holds your gifts today.

This week, I invite you to two sets of reflections:

- What were your unique gifts shared in your life before now? What are your unique gifts at this time in your life? What are the gifts you hold in the seventh jar?
- How can you use the abundance of your gifts from your seventh jar to respond to others who are in need of "new wine"?

Let us conclude with a poem prayer from the Presbyterian minister [Thom Shuman](#) who brings all our readings together in a lovely manner:

We come in these endless days, Precious God,  
people in need of the constancy of your love:  
may we drink deeply from your fountain of life;  
may we continue to be guided by your Light.

We gather in these weary days, Water-changing God,  
people looking for signs of hope and wonder:  
may we drink deeply from your fountain of grace;  
may our weariness be wrapped in your Hope.

We worship in these overwhelming days, Gifting God,  
people who try to point others to Jesus:  
may we drink deeply from your fountain of joy;  
may our life be strengthened by your Life.

**Wedding Feast at Cana**  
Aloysius McVeigh rsm (Ireland)

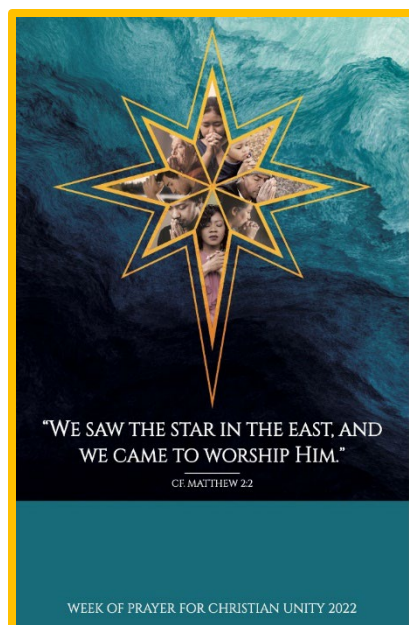




## REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 23 January 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

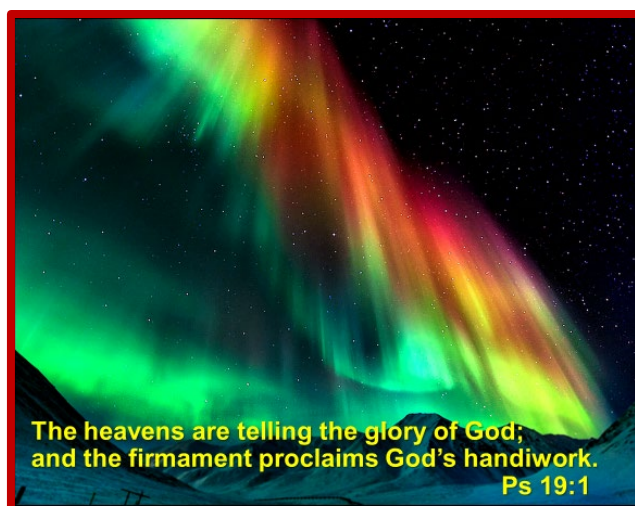
Today is the annual Sunday of the Word of God established by Pope Francis in 2019. In the letter naming the day, Pope Francis said, "I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This Sunday of the Word of God will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity."



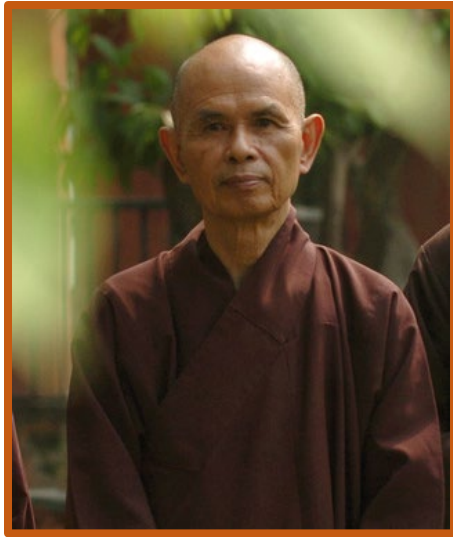
It is not a coincidence then that this is also Sunday during the Week for Christian Unity which ends on this coming Tuesday. This year's theme for the Week is, "We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him" (Mt 2:2), prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches (from Beirut, Lebanon). The theme speaks to the world's need for solidarity and transformation in facing current political, economic, and social challenges, as well as the injustices highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of this Week, Pope Francis says, "We Christians, in the diversity of our confessions and traditions, are also pilgrims on our way to full unity, and we come closer to our goal the more we keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, our only Lord."

Our readings in today's Liturgy of the Word centre us on the Word of God in the many diverse ways in which God speaks to us. God's first word is spoken to create the universe, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen 1:1-3). The universe in turn becomes the word of God. Richard Rohr ofm says it simply yet profoundly, "Creation itself is the first incarnation of Christ, the primary and foundational 'Bible' that reveals the path to God."

The Scriptures have also been telling us this, but only in recent times have we begun to hear what the Scriptures were saying. Today's Psalm 19 begins with these words, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Ps 19:1-4). We are familiar with the words from Job, "But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you" (Job 12:7-8). God's word, spoken at creation, continues



every day in every expression of new galaxies, new planets, new plants and trees, newborn animals, newborn babies.



Earth herself is an ongoing expression of the word of God. During this past week, we learned of the death of the beloved Buddhist monk and teacher from Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh. In his *Love Letter to the Earth*, he said, “At this very moment, the Earth is above you, below you, all around you, and even inside you. The Earth is everywhere. You may be used to thinking of the Earth as only the ground beneath your feet. But the water, the sea, the sky, and everything around us comes from the Earth. Everything outside us and everything inside us comes from the Earth. We often forget that the planet we are living on has given us all the elements that make up our bodies. The water in our flesh, our bones, and all the microscopic cells inside our bodies all come from the Earth and are part of the Earth. The Earth is not just the environment we live in. We are the Earth and we are always carrying her within us.”

God’s word is spoken again in the coming of Jesus into our midst. John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:1-2, 14). Jesus speaks God’s word by his very presence among us, begun in his years in Judah and Galilee, and continued now in his life within us, within all creation.

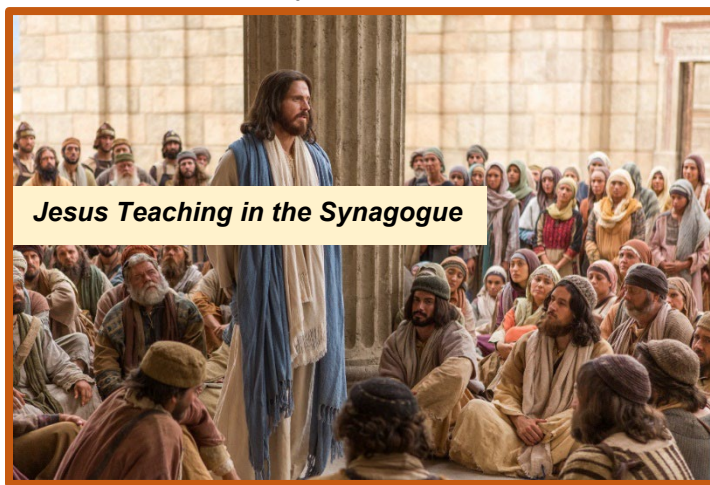
When we hear the phrase “Word of God,” our first thought tends to be the written word in our Scriptures. Every religious tradition has its holy books. We are blessed to share parts of our Scriptures, our Bible, with Jews and with Muslims. One of my favourite passages from the Old Testament is today’s reading from the book of Nehemiah, set in the time when the people have just returned from exile. Now they are no longer the people of the land (the land belongs to the Persians, then to the Greeks, then to the Romans). But, as today’s reading proclaims, they have become the people of the book. Notice how carefully the writer of Nehemiah tells us to whom Ezra is reading the Torah (the book of the Law), “men and women and all who could hear with understanding” (Neh 8:2, 3) – this is so important that it is repeated twice in this short passage. The reading of the word is for everyone in the community, not just the priests and scribes and Levites, not just the men, not just the adults, but everyone who can understand. The word is meant for the community and for the individuals in the community.

There are three other connections made in the reading. The people on hearing the reading bowed down their heads and worshipped the God. The reading is God speaking, but it is not complete until the people hear, understand, and respond. The time of the reading makes the day holy which in turn causes us to know that “the joy of the Lord is our strength” (Neh 8:10). And that is cause for celebration, for eating good food and drinking good wine and sharing with those who have no food. And it is no coincidence that the reading happens at the Water Gate, the place where the people come for lifegiving water for themselves and for their animals. This connects us back to God’s word spoken first at creation with the creation of water on days two and three (Gen 1:6-10).



The word is not simply about hearing; it is about a response from our whole being – our emotions, our rejoicing, our celebrating in community with shared meals, our sharing our food with those who have none. The word of God is not complete until the heavens and Earth respond, until the Earth creatures respond, until people respond. Psalm 19 again reminds us that the word is never simply the word alone, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you” (Ps 19:14).

In today’s Gospel Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2), “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:17-19). Veronica Lawson rsm helps us understand the meaning of Jesus’ teaching here, “The Greek word translated as ‘oppressed’ literally means ‘shattered’. It evokes images of asylum seekers in detention centres and of the hundreds of thousands displaced by war or persecution. It evokes the pain of the Earth itself and the more-



than-human inhabitants of our planet suffering the effects of the climate crisis and ecological destruction. If the gospel message is to be well-grounded in our times, the ‘destitute’ and ‘shattered’ of our Earth community, the destitute of the human community and the endangered plant and animal species of the planet, must find the ‘release’ of which the gospel speaks.”

And finally, God’s word is spoken by you and me. Indeed, for some, you may be the only Gospel people will ever read! Think about the terrible wonder of

that, the intense joy of that – God trusts you and me to be the word of God in our space and in our time. When you support someone by your words or your presence, you are God’s word for that person. When you fail to do so, you are denying that person the right to hear God’s word from you. Our reading from 1 Corinthians reminds us that every single one of us, in our own unique way, brings a reflection of God’s presence in the gifts which God gives us. No one of us has better gifts or a better reflection of God’s word. Each one of us has the special privilege of using our gifts to build up others and to build up the community. We are bearers of the word of God, sometimes by our words and sometimes by our presence alone. We are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

We conclude our reflections with this simple poem from [Anne Osdieck](#) which gathers many of the threads together:

Jesus  
stood up,  
unrolled the scroll  
just as had Ezra, the priest-scribe,  
and announced to  
the assembly  
  
and to us

that God is in our midst  
this day.

Earth is holy now.

Anoint our being and doings,  
Touch all our days,  
with grace.

Let us honor this world  
and its people.

On this Sunday of the Word of God in this Week of Christian Unity, let us be mindful that our words, our actions, our presence may be the only Gospel that another person reads. Let us be mindful that, among those with whom we live, we are the Gospel that the other person reads most often! We are the word of God together with all who are part of the sacred communion of all creation – the galaxies, the planets, the sun and the moon, the snow and the rain, the mountains and the rivers, the plants and insects, the animals wild and domestic, human persons. The word of God spoken in creation speaks today through all creation. Let us find our joy in the strength of our God!

## **GOD'S WORD ALIVE IN OUR WORLD**



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 30 January 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Our four readings in our Liturgy of the Word this morning speak about God's invitation to us to live fully. In the first reading, we hear God's call to Jeremiah, in the Gospel Jesus' response to God's call in the first moments of his public ministry, and in the Psalm and the reading from the first letter to the Corinthians each one of us is included in God's call. In all four readings, we learn that the call is precious, is unique to each one, respects each one's gifts, comes to us in the everydayness of our lives. God's call is to each one, each created being human and other-than-human.

From our readings, we learn that responding to the call comes at a cost. And we learn that the God who calls is always there to give strength and support in the person's response.



In the verses chosen today from the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah tells us how he heard God's call, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). How profound are these few words meant for us as they were for Jeremiah – God imagines us even before God creates us, God calls us holy before we are even born, and God calls us to go beyond our comfortable space "to all nations." Every one of God's creatures is chosen by God to come into being and to be holy.

But there is a second part of Jeremiah's call – that is the expectation that the response to God's call will not always be easy or comfortable or without pain. Martin Luther said it simply, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." The one consolation is that God will be there, "I am with you to deliver you" (Jer 1:19). The psalmist, in extending the call to all of us, echoes this same message, "In you, O God, I take refuge. . . be to me a rock of refuge. . . For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O lord, from my youth" (Ps 71:1, 3, 5).

The first three readings all refer to our whole lifetime, beginning in Jeremiah with God's presence to us before our birth, at our birth, and when we are still young. The psalmist says, "Upon you I have leaned from my birth; from my mother's womb you have been my strength" (Ps 71:6). In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of his life as a child when he spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child (1 Cor 12:11). God's presence is with us for every moment of our lives, meeting us in that moment, loving us and nourishing us in that moment. Do we treasure every moment of our life as God's gift to us?

Celeste Snowber has written a [\*Bodypsalms for Lifelines\*](#) which reads in part:

Follow the threads of your life which announce joy  
a deep resonance for who you were meant to be  
when every bone, tissue, cell and fibre of your being  
says YES all over again to why you are here  
what you are meant for



It can be simple as a gesture of love or a glance at a falling leaf  
or a pen to page or limb to dance  
Follow the small and large visions placed in your heart  
burning in your skin, the subtle impulses  
and bold pulls of what you are called to  
Each thread is a line, a curve,  
a map to your delicious life that wants to be lived through you.

Every moment in our lifeline is a moment of prophecy lived in response to God's invitation to us at that time in our lives. Whether we are newborn or teenaged or young adult or middle-aged or older, we are called to live our response to the person God has called us to be. "Each thread is a line, a curve, a map to your delicious life that wants to be lived through you." What is God calling you to be in this moment in your life – what is the map to your delicious life today?

The reading from Luke's Gospel is troubling. Jesus has just begun a special moment in his lifeline – the beginning of his public ministry. And he begins that moment in his hometown where he was brought up, comfortable, well-known as Joseph's son, and welcomed to read often in the synagogue. We are told, "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" (Lk 4:22). We can imagine how good that must have made Jesus feel – think about a time when the people of the place where you grew up celebrated you in a special way.



Then everything changes. Jesus reminds the faithful ones of his village of Nazareth that God also reaches out into the places we would never expect. The prophet Elijah goes to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon in Phoenicia, and Elisha cures Naaman of Syria from leprosy (neither were people of Israel or Judah).

The people of his hometown were "filled with rage" and threatened to throw him off the cliff. The writer of the Gospel says, "Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way" (Lk 4:30). But just imagine how Jesus must have felt, to be rejected and threatened by his own people, the people who had cared for him and supported him when he was growing up. His heart must have been breaking as he walked away.



What made the people so angry? Was it because Jesus dared to say that, to fulfill the Scriptures, they had to reach out to those who were not their own kind, to reach out to those who may even be their enemies? Dorothy Stang and, the American sister who was martyred in Brazil in 2005 for her work among the poorest people in that country, once said, "You love God as much as you love the person whom you love least."

In the well-known poem on love in 1 Corinthians, Paul echoes Jesus' teaching as he begins his ministry. Our first and most important response to God's invitation, no matter at what point we are on our lifeline, is love. Having and sharing love is more important than being an influential speaker, a powerful prophet, or even a

person of deep faith – almost scandalous words! It is not always easy to have love, especially for those who do not think like me or look like me or value what I value. Ask Jeremiah and Jesus the price which they paid for loving! And yet that must be our first and constant response to God's call.

This week I invite you to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-8:

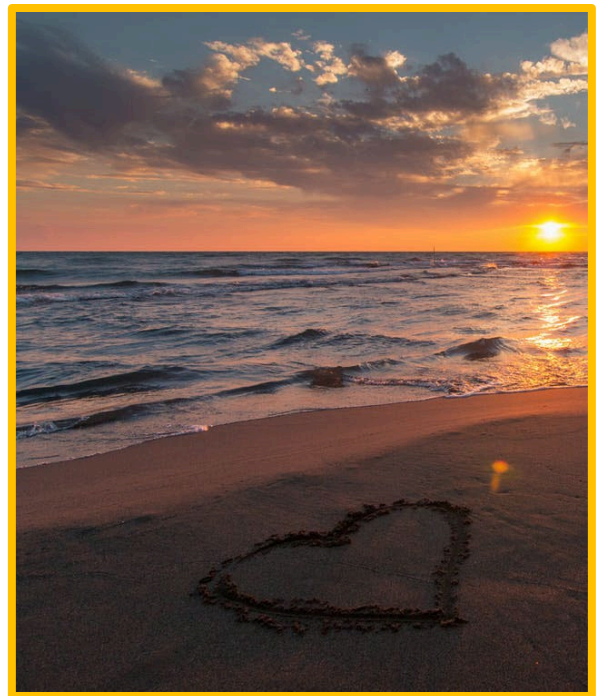
Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Reflect on which of the phrases describes how you live every day, which of the phrases challenges you most deeply, which of the phrases describes your greatest gift to those with whom you share your life journey today.

Let us conclude our reflections with a poem-prayer from the Progressive Christianity website, entitled "[A Celebration of Love](#)":

I have had many beautiful encounters with love in my life –  
Sometimes it has been the love of nature – the soft lines,  
strong trunks and the mossy smell of bush.

Sometimes love has been  
the tenderness of another person –  
a oneness in relationship, shared silence,  
the mingling of tears,  
the fragile flower of romance.  
Sometimes love has been  
a passion for justice, the fight for equality,  
a concern for others,  
grief at the Church's divisions,  
anger at its petty-mindedness.  
Sometimes love has been parenting  
of child and adult, of others and self,  
of nature and ideas.  
Sometimes love has been creating  
words and music, color and form,  
line and texture, buildings and gardens,  
one's own kind and one's own life.  
Sometimes love has been pain and sorrow,  
sometimes dream and fulfillment,  
sometimes tearful ecstasy,  
sometimes common sense practicality,



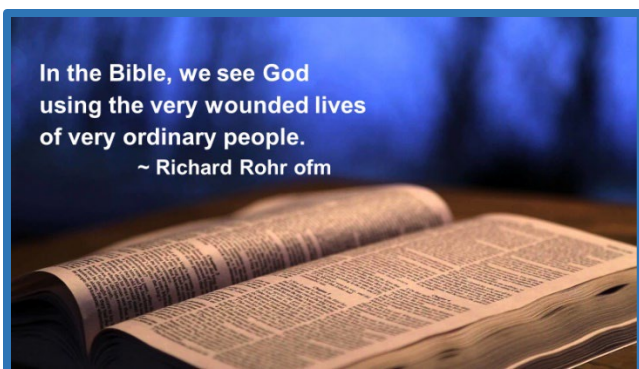
But at all times love has nurtured me, enlivened me.  
fulfilled me, wooed me and drawn me on into the oneness of God,  
divine lover, creator, liberator, never-dying life, the source of all our loving.  
And now in the knowledge that no love is ever wasted  
and that all love becomes part of God's love,  
I thankfully celebrate all the loving that God  
has graciously allowed me to partake, create, or enhance.

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 06 February 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Our God is a calling God. Our God calls each one of us to be a missionary disciple, spreading the good news wherever we are present – no matter what our age or our health status or our role in society or our education or our energy levels. This is both terrifying and encouraging – terrifying because God expects each one of us to spread the good news and encouraging because God trusts each one of us to spread the good news despite our own fears about our ability to do so. When God calls, there is an invitation. God always gives us a choice in how we respond.

Richard Rohr ofm says that the good news which the calling God invites us to share is about relationships. He notes, “The Bible is for the sake of a love affair between God and the soul. . . One way to read the entire Bible is to note the gradual unveiling of our faces, the gradual creating of ‘persons’ capable of relationship with God and all others. . . It is relationship, ‘the face of the other,’ that transforms us, converts us, and gives us our deepest identity.”

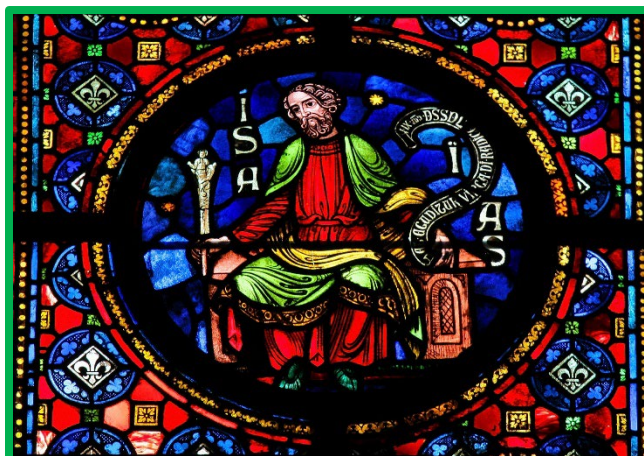


Today's Psalm 138 gives us the comforting words as we fear our ability to share the good news in this way, “You Lord will fulfill your purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever” (Ps 138:8). God who calls us to love leads the way by never failing to give us steadfast love.

The other three readings this morning show how this happens in the lives of three people: Isaiah, Paul, and Peter. Each one is called, and each one knows that he cannot live up to what God expects. But, again, to quote Richard Rohr ofm, “In the Bible, we see God using the very wounded lives of very ordinary people. . . It's not about becoming spiritual beings nearly as much as about becoming human beings. The biblical revelation is saying that we are already spiritual beings; we just don't know it yet. The Bible tries to let us in on the secret, by revealing God in the ordinary.” Or to hear the same consoling words in another way, the Hasidic Rabbi, Menachem Mendel of Poland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, says simply, “Your holiness shall consist of being truly human, not angelic. God has plenty of angels.”

Our first reading describes the call of Isaiah, a very different description from the call of Jeremiah. Both Jeremiah and Isaiah protest their inadequacies, with Jeremiah saying “Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (Jer 1:6). Isaiah is much more dramatic, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Is 6:1).

We can more readily identify with the call of Jeremiah – the Lord God who calls him is gently encouraging and supportive, speaking





directly in an engaging conversation with Jeremiah in a quiet and calm place. In the call of Isaiah, God's robe fills the temple (the largest building the people of that time could imagine), attended by angels with six wings and surrounded by many voices, the shaking of the building, and much smoke. The Lord God simply puts out his hand and touches Jeremiah's mouth promising to give him the words he will need. However, one of the angels takes a live coal from the altar with tongs and touches Isaiah's mouth taking away his sin and guilt. Both prophets accept the call. God asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah answers, "Here I am, send me" (Is 6:8).

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us that "I am the least of the Apostles, unfit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor 15:9). He adds, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am" (1Cor 15:10). He describes the essence of the good news – that Christ died and was raised, appearing to the disciples (some of whom he names) and to the brothers and sisters (although he does not mention any women by name!).

In the Gospel of Luke, we have the story of the Simon and the two sons of Zebedee fishing all night and catching nothing. In Luke's version, this marks the beginning of the relationship between Jesus and the apostles – their call to become his followers. We hear an almost identical version of the story in the Gospel of John, but now it is after the resurrection when Jesus the Risen One encourages Simon, the two sons of Zebedee, and the other fishermen to put out their nets even though they had caught nothing all night. It would be interesting to spend more time exploring why the two Gospel writers use the same story in a very different context – one at the first call of the disciples (Luke) and one at their renewed call after the resurrection of Jesus (John). The timing

**Fishing for People, Artist Unknown**



of the two stories does remind us that God does not call us at one moment in time, but the call is repeated over and over. God does not call us and then leave us alone to answer – we are in a relationship which is ongoing and reveals itself in every moment of our changing lives.

In Luke's story, we hear Simon cry out, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Just as Isaiah and Paul had been given the comforting strength of God to answer their fears about being good enough, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Lk 5:10).

This story from Luke's Gospel is held within the embrace of Earth – the waters of Lake Gennesaret, the shore of the lake, the wooden boats, the woven nets, and the fish are intimately connected to the call of the disciples and the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. The lake and the "deep water" bring us back to the first story of creation. Elaine Wainwright rsm says so beautifully, "Our place is recognising that we are of Earth, from Earth, and that we will return to Earth. We are Earth-creatures just as Peter and his companions were fishers. Jesus took the word describing their occupation and shifted its focus from the fish of the Lake of Gennesaret to people. At this time as Earth-creatures, we are being called by the earthed-Jesus of the gospel to earth-people. We are discovering Jesus anew as we put out into the deep of our universe. We are being called to leave behind old ways of acting which ignore Earth's others and to find the new. The words of Jesus to Simon will accompany us, too: 'Do not be afraid'." I love that image – we are earth-people!

Today we have reason to rejoice that our God loves us enough to call us into relationship – relationship with the God who creates us and loves us, relationship with each other on our life's journey, relationship with Earth with whom we are one, and relationship with ourselves as we move from fears about our unworthiness to trust in our giftedness.

The scripture scholar, Walter Brueggemann, teaches us this profound prayer:

You are the God who makes extravagant promises.  
We relish your great promises of fidelity and presence and solidarity,  
and we exude in them.

Only to find out, always too late,  
that your promise always comes  
in the midst of a hard, deep call to obedience.

You are the God who calls people like us,  
and the long list of mothers and fathers before us,  
who trusted the promise enough to keep the call.

So we give you thanks that you are a calling God,  
who calls always to dangerous new places.  
We pray enough of your grace and mercy among us  
that we may be among those who believe your promises  
enough to respond to your call.

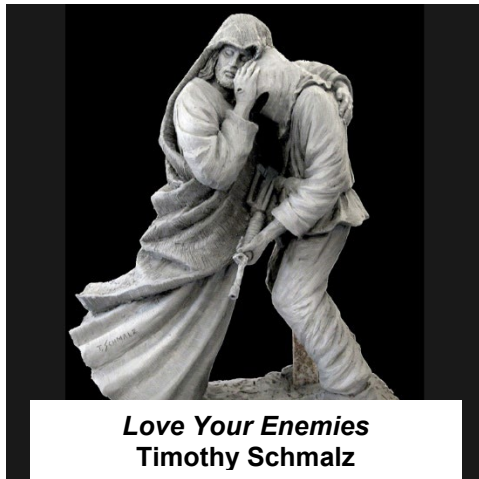
We pray in the one who embodied your promise  
and enacted your call, even Jesus. Amen.

We thank you, calling God, for calling us, for trusting us to be bearers of the good news, and for keeping your extravagant promises to us to be with us in steadfast love every step of the way!

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 20 February 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk 6:27). I do not have any enemies, so today’s readings do not have much to say to me. I expect that is what most of us would conclude. And then we hear Jesus’s first words, “I say to you that listen.” While we may not use the word “enemies” to speak about people in our lives, we know that there are many whom we find it difficult to love.



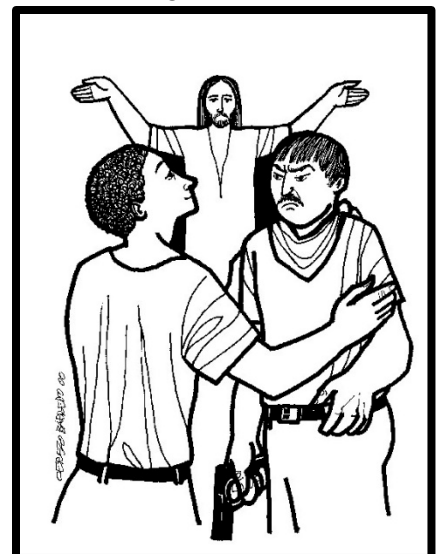
**Love Your Enemies**  
**Timothy Schmalz**

When Jesus tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves or to welcome strangers, we understand and accept it. But it is much more difficult to love those who do not like us, those who have hurt us in the past in our own family or among our Sisters in community, those who have not shown us respect or whose decisions have caused us harm. It is so difficult to love people who do not think like us or share our values or respect what we respect. It is so difficult for us to love people who have harmed others by stealing from them or cheating on them or physically or sexually abusing them. It is so difficult for us to love those who have caused wars or violent protests or drug wars or those who have entrapped people through human trafficking.

Does Jesus really mean that we should love them? Apparently so! The story of David and Saul in our first reading gives an example of a person who had an opportunity for revenge and chose instead to show compassion. David spared Saul because he believed that Saul was precious to God and, therefore, was precious to David. As I have quoted many times, Dorothy Stang (the American sister who was martyred in Brazil in 2005 for her work among the poorest people in that country) haunts me with her words, “You love God as much as you love the person whom you love least.”

What does loving such people mean? Jesus is also clear about that – do good to them, bless them, pray for them, offer them from your own plenty, be merciful to them. This does not mean that people who do wrong should not be held accountable. But it does mean being merciful to them as God is merciful to all of God’s creatures. Pope Francis used this quotation from Luke’s Gospel as the theme for the Year of Mercy in 2016, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Today’s Psalm 103 describes what this merciful God looks like – it is a direct quotation from Exodus 34 when Moses asks God who God is. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps 103:8). Verses 4 and 13 repeat the words steadfast love, mercy, and compassion.

These words – steadfast love, gracious, mercy, compassion – are all mercy words with each one having its own reflection of mercy. “Steadfast love” and “mercy” are the translations of the Hebrew word *hesed* which refers to the covenant love between



**Love Your Enemies**  
**Cerezo Barredo**



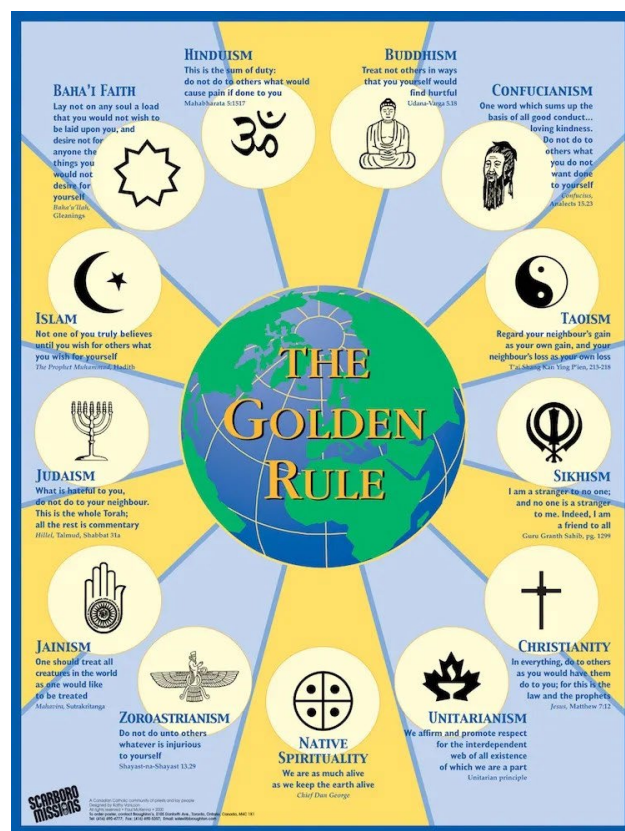
God and the chosen people, the love that is rooted in right relationships. In our time, we understand this steadfast love or *hesed* in the new awareness that we are all part of the sacred communion of all creation, bound by the love of the Creator whose love became incarnate in the creation of the universe. The word “compassion” is translated from the Hebrew *rahamim* which means womb-love, the love a mother feels for her yet-to-be-born child, a deep and tender feeling of compassion which is aroused by the sight of weakness or suffering. This is the word which Jesus uses in his invitation to us to “Be merciful,” the Greek word *oiktirmones*. And the word “gracious” is the translation of the Hebrew *hanan*, grace or favour, a disposition which is permanent, kind, gracious and generous. These are the qualities of loving our enemies which are at the heart of who God is and which are at the heart of who we are called to become.

During this coming week, I encourage you to reflect on these words alive in your life. Practice *hesed* as you imagine one of God’s creatures other-than-human whom you do not like or who scares you (possibly mosquitoes or snakes or . . .) but whom you share in this sacred communion of all creation. Practice *rahamim* as you suffer with someone in pain in mind or body or spirit. Prayer with them, listen to their story, be with them in their pain and suffering. Practice *hanan* with someone whom you feel does not like you – be gracious and generous to them in a special way this week. Be merciful in all the ways that your compassionate God is merciful.

The Gospel passage also quotes one of the most famous of all religious sayings known as the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). Every major world religion has some form of this same teaching in its sacred writings, echoing Jesus words about how we are to treat each other. How important this teaching must be if every religious tradition in the East and in the West take it so seriously!

Some examples include the following:

- ✓ Buddhism – “Do not offend others as you would not want to be offended” (Udanavarga 5:18).
- ✓ Islam – “None of you are true believers until you love for your brother or sister what you love for yourself” (Prophet Muhammad).
- ✓ Judaism – “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary” (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a).
- ✓ Confucianism – Tzu-kung asked, “Is there one word which can serve as the guiding principle for conduct throughout life?” Confucius said, “It is the word altruism (shu). Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” (Analects 15:23).
- ✓ Sikhism – “I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all” (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299).
- ✓ Taoism – “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss” (T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213–218).



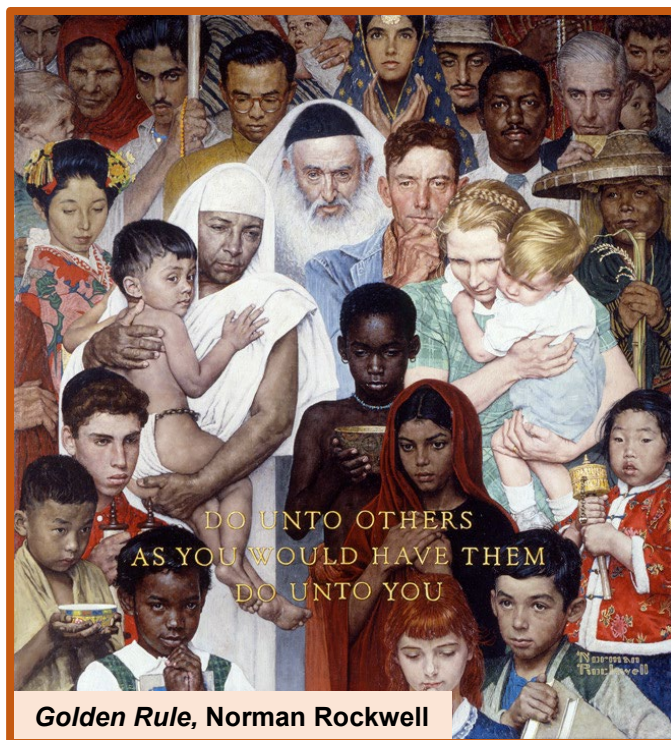
The Scarborough Missions Golden Rule Poster

- ✓ Jainism – “One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated” (Mahavira, Sutrakritanga).
- ✓ Indigenous Spirituality – “We are much alive as we keep the Earth alive” (Chief Dan George).

Susan Mark Landis speaks for all of us, in this profound prayer:

Lord, the hardest thing you asked  
 was that we love our enemies.  
 We know how we would like to love them:  
 We would love our enemies to be far away.  
 We would love them  
 not to compromise our security.  
 We would love them not to scare us  
 or change the way we live.  
 We would love them to be lovable.  
 You know, God, we would love it to be popular  
 to love enemies.  
 We would love our neighbors to respect us  
 for this good deed.  
 We would love the people on the news  
 to provide examples of how to love.  
 But then, if loving enemies were easy,  
 Jesus would not have told us about the tax  
 collectors and gentiles,  
 Who love only their friends.  
 If loving enemies were easy, we know  
 We would not need God's strong arms to bear  
 us up in difficult times.

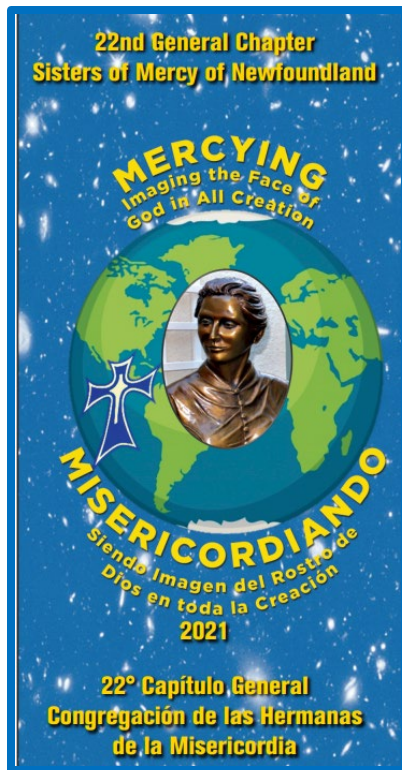
We would not need the blood of Christ to save us from human sin.  
 We would not need the Spirit flowing among us, wiping our tears.  
 We would not need the Bible to tell us what the world does not.  
 God of all mercy,  
 Who loved us when we were your sinful enemies,  
 Who saved us through your immeasurable grace,  
 Who gave us a gift we did not deserve,  
 Let us imitate you by loving those who are yet our enemies.  
 Teach us to know how to love enemies,  
 To wish them the best of the life you intend each human to have,  
 And then pray and act so those wishes come true.  
 Teach us hope, so we know that with your blessing, impossible dreams become reality.  
 Teach us faith, so we know that only the strength to stop hating  
 will halt the cycles of violence and revenge.  
 Teach us forgiveness, which we know is suffering love through piercing tears.  
 Teach us, O Lord, your ways.  
 When our community looks at our congregation,  
 Hears our words and sees our deeds,  
 Help them to know that you, the God of love, live among us  
 And that they can come to us to learn about Christian love of enemies.





## REFLECTIONS FOR THE EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 27 February 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale



Today's Liturgy of the Word, the last Sunday before Lent begins, is woven with imagination, images, and integrity. Imagination is the ability of our minds to think in pictures – we use our imagination when we daydream, plan, remember, or meditate. Imagination through memory helps us recall events of the past; it allows us to contemplate our lives in the present; and it enables us to visualize our future.

Imagination is not only a gift from God – it is one more way in which we become the face of God in our world. The Sisters of Merct Chapter 2021 theme calls us to be prophets of imagination: *Mercying: Imaging the Face of God in all creation ~ Misericordiendo: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación.*

You have heard me read before the lovely poem by [Roddy Hamilton](#), *God's Imagination*:

Who puts the copper into beach trees  
and the waddle into penguins  
who chose the colours of a rainbow and put shapes into clouds  
*The Spirit of creation ~ God's imagination*  
Who put the notes into music  
and picked the dance steps for bees  
who placed the hum in humming birds and decided elephants would listen with their feet  
*The Spirit of creation ~ God's imagination*  
Who invented yeast to make bread rise and put the curve into a banana  
who made laughter infectious and chocolate taste like heaven  
*The Spirit of creation ~ God's imagination*  
Today we celebrate the energy of God who created us  
and brings us together in a colourful and loving community  
*We call her the Spirit*

How does God's word today invite us into the energy and hope of imagination? The reading from the book of Sirach compares us to a sieve which when shaken shows the refuse and allows the good to fall through. It compares us to a kiln which tests the potter's vessels. It compares us to a tree and our words to the fruit of the tree. All three images speak to the integrity of the person with images from nature and from the work of human hands.

Psalm 92 also chooses to speak about the integrity of the righteous – as we say today, those who are in right relationship with our God, with each other, with Earth and all creation, and with ourselves. The psalm compares us to the tree – both the palm and the cedar, planted in the house of

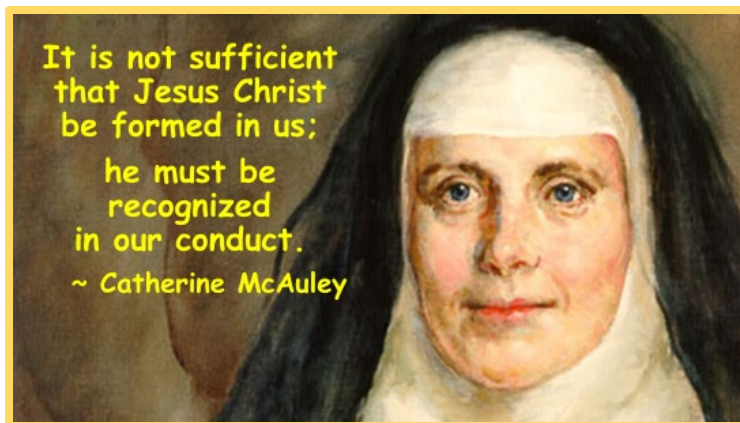




our God. And, in one of the few verses of the Scriptures to do so, strengthens the image to show that a life lived well is like the tree which produces fruit even in old age, green and full of sap.

Jesus chooses multiple images in the passage from Luke's Gospel, again to help us appreciate the integrity of persons – the one who sees the speck in the eye of another but does not notice the log in their own eye, the good fruit-bearing tree, the words spoken from the abundance of the heart.

Why is integrity – being true to yourself, holding your own values, being authentic – so important? Having integrity means that you are trusted – others know that they can depend on you to be who you say you are. It means that you can trust yourself and your own instincts and that you are at peace with yourself. It means that you are confident in the person whom God created you to be. It means having the courage to stand up for what is right. Having integrity means that you will create around circles of persons of integrity who see themselves reflected in your goodness. It means that you call other, inspire others to be persons of integrity.



Persons of integrity keep their word and their commitments. They know the space in which they live. They take responsibility. They keep their promises and never betray another's confidence. They give credit when credit is due. They never take advantage of others, and they choose to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Having integrity does not mean that you are perfect. Rather it means that

you are constantly becoming the person whom God is calling you to be. The founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, described integrity perfectly as she quotes from the first letter of John: "It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us; he must be recognized in our conduct . . . 'Let us love not in word nor in tongue but in deed and in truth'" (1 John 3:18). Others have described in succinctly as well:

- ✓ "Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching." ~ C S Lewis
- ✓ The first thing is, to be honest with yourself. You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself. Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, but humility." ~ Nelson Mandela
- ✓ "When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you." ~ Lao Tzu
- ✓ "Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love." ~ Miguel Angel Ruiz (Mexican shaman, teacher, and author)

Like the sieve that sorts the real from the refuse, like the kiln that ensures the integrity of the pottery, like the tree that produces good fruit even to old age remaining green and full of sap, like the person who first takes out the log in their own eye before even seeing the speck in the eye of the other, may our lives show forth the integrity of our being. May our mouths speak words of truth overflowing abundantly from the treasury of our hearts. As Paul says in the first letter to the

Corinthians, “May we be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

Let us reflect this week on two questions:

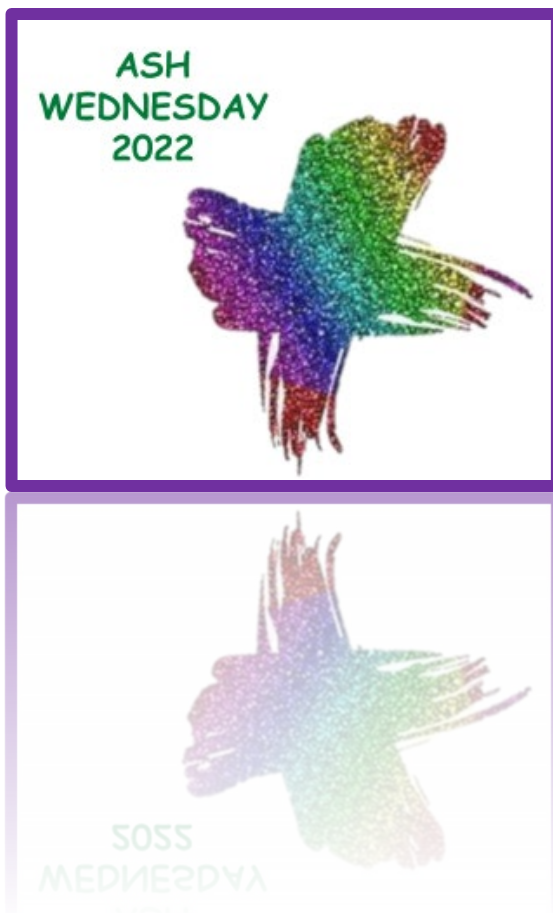
1. When have I recently spoken truth to another person, a small group or a large group, even when it was not easy to do so?
2. When have I recently done a good deed from the abundance of my heart, making another person’s life better or more joy-filled?

And let us this week join with God’s imagination – write a simple prayer or a poem or a short story, paint or do a pencil sketch, approach a challenging problem in a new way, play new music that I have never heard before, rearrange the special pieces on my prayer table or shelf, do a new thing with gusto and with gratitude!

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the first day of our Lenten journey. As we begin this special journey, let us go back to [Roddy Hamilton](#) to hear his poignant blessings for us as we enter this wilderness time:

May the dust of the wilderness hold our footprints  
lovingly  
shaped as they are by your hurt  
for dust remembers  
May the journey into wilderness unfold  
honestly  
for honesty is the gift  
your soul recognises as you  
May your time in this wilderness  
be shaped by space  
rather than minutes  
so there is time enough for all of you  
May the stones in this wilderness  
cry out your name loudly  
that your spirit recognises the voice  
that has been calling you always  
And may you know this wilderness  
has been expecting you  
and you find between the stones  
a promise growing

Blessings of joy and hope as Lent approaches!



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 13 February 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you” (Job 12:8). We are becoming more and more aware that God speaks to us through two books: the little book of Scripture and the big book of creation – the written sacred text and the living sacred text. Once again in our readings in the Liturgy of the Word this morning, these two books come together to teach us.



The plants of Earth which teach us today are trees. Trees are among the oldest living things on earth, in existence for 370 million years. It is estimated that there are some three trillion mature trees in the world today although they are being destroyed at an alarming rate. As far as we know, the oldest tree now living in a ristlecone pine, estimated to be 5,076 years old. So, there are trees alive today that were already ancient in the time of Jesus.

Trees play a significant role in reducing erosion and moderating the climate. They remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store large quantities of carbon in their tissues. Trees and forests provide a habitat for many species of animals and plants with tropical rainforests among the most biodiverse habitats in the world. Trees provide shade and shelter, timber for construction, fuel for cooking and heating, and fruit for food. They renew our spirits simply by letting us walk among them or climb them!

One of my favourite books was given me by my nephew Alan. Entitled *The Hidden Life of Trees* and written by forester Peter Wohlleben, it makes the case that the forest is a social network. The author draws on groundbreaking scientific discoveries to describe how trees are like human families: tree parents live together with their children, communicate with them, support them as they grow, share nutrients with those who are sick or struggling, and even warn each other of impending dangers. The studies reveal the amazing symbioses trees have with fungi, microbes, and other species. Most of these relationships occur under the living soil, while more happen on the surface of the trees and leaves. In the words of the ecologist Mark Ditmanson, “The intricate enmeshing of life forms reveals that all earthlings need each other, and that God obviously brought all this into a shared pattern of being. Living together, seeking harmony, and finding mutual benefit are the truths these epiphanies in forests reveal.”



Trees have always been revered, with sacred groves in various cultures. Trees are mentioned in the Bible more than any living thing other than God and people. From the first chapters of Genesis



to the book of Psalms (beginning with today's Psalm 1) and to the last chapters of Revelation, trees reveal God to us and reveal us to each other and ourselves. The diversity is apparent with more than thirty named trees, including Acacia (Ex 25: 5), Sandalwood (2 Chron 2:8), Almond (Gen 30:37), Appletree (Sg of Sgs 2:3), Mulberry (2 Sam 5:23), Broom (1 Kgs 19: 4), Cedar (1 Kgs 4:33), Cypress (2 Kgs 19:23), Ebony (Ezek 27:15), Fig (Matt 21:19), Myrtle (Neh 8:15), Walnut (Sg of Sgs 6:11), Oak (Gene 35:8), Olive (Jdgs 9:8), Palm tree (Ex 15:27), Platane (Gen 30:37), Poplar (Gen 30:37), Sycamore (Lk 19:4), Tamarisk (Gen 21:33), Willow (Ezek 17:5), and Vine (Ps 107:37).



In the Bible, trees designate meeting places: Elijah in his despair is under the juniper tree where he is nourished in body and spirit by the angel (1 Kgs 19:5-8), Zacchaeus meets Jesus under the sycamore tree and is forever changed (Luke 19: 1-10), Jesus sees Nathaniel under the fig tree and calls him to become a disciple (Jn 1:46-50). Trees are places of revelation to a person:

Abraham and Sarah encounter three mysterious travelers under the oak of Mamre where they are both told by God that they will have a son (Gen 18:1-15), at the

burning bush Moses meets God, learns God's name, and is called to lead the people from Egypt (Ex 3:1-21), and Deborah carried out her role as judge in Israel under the palm tree (Jgs 4:1-5). Jesus points to the mustard tree as the image of the kingdom of God (Matt 13:31-32).

One of the more persistent images of the tree is its fruit-bearing. In our first reading today from Jeremiah we read, "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer 7-8). This is echoed in Psalm 1, "Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God's law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither" (Ps 1:2-3). For many of us who today suffer pain, illness, less acute memory, or challenges in walking, we feel that we no longer can be in active ministry as we once were. The trees teach us that we bear fruit in season – that fruit changes as the seasons change, but the fruit is no less rich and plentiful.



The lovely passage from 1 Corinthians reminds us about the key truth of our faith, "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor 15:20). We echo this truth every time we say the Apostles Creed, the oldest statement of our faith outside the Scriptures, "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." Our material being,

our earthiness, is Christ's material being and Christ's earthiness and, in his resurrection, becomes the first fruits of all of us who will be raised in our earthly being.

Luke's Gospel reminds us of the fruits we yield in their season. Jesus teaches the beatitudes but with two major differences from the teaching on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. The writer of Luke's Gospel tells us very definitely that the teaching happens on "a level place" not on the Mountain. Everyone – Jesus, the disciples, the people from all the regions – is on the level place. All see each other eye to eye! And, unlike Matthew's Gospel, Luke's version gives both the blessings and the woes. For most of us, the woes are indeed woes since they speak about those who are rich, full, laughing and spoken about positively. That describes most of us in our lives.

There are two lessons for us. The first lesson, taught by the trees in Jeremiah and Psalm 1 is that, if we have everything we want, it is difficult to know our vulnerability before God – we begin to believe that we deserve everything that we have received, that we have earned it by working hard and living a good life. The second lesson is how we respond from our place of privilege – whether we reach out to those who are poor, hungry, weeping, excluded, or reviled. This begins with the people with whom we live every day – do we reach out to them in their sadness or loneliness or need? It reaches out to our support for The Gathering Place or St. Patrick's mercy Home or St. Clare's Mercy Hospital or our ministry in Puerto Eten or Huarmey. It reaches out to our care for our common home in how we act as good stewards in our own places or in our efforts to bring about better care for Earth beyond our own places.

On Tuesday, we will celebrate Valentine's Day, one day during the year when we are encouraged to reflect on and be grateful for love in our lives. The philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, reminds us, "When you love you should not say, 'God is in my heart,' but rather, 'I am in the heart of God.'" The Presbyterian pastor, [Thom Shuman](#), brings today's themes together within the heart of God:

God of our wonder, Heart of creation:  
we are blessed when we feast on your Word:  
    that Word which embraces us;  
    that Word which teaches us;  
    that Word which transfigures us;  
    that Word which grounds us.  
Give us your Word this, and every, day.

Jesus Christ, Heart of God's children:  
we are blessed when we have your compassion:  
    that heart for the poor;  
        for the hungry;  
    for those who weep;  
    for those left out.  
Give us your heart this, and every, day.

Holy Delight, Grace's Heartbeat:  
we bear fruit when we overflow with your spirit:  
    that spirit of generosity;  
    that spirit of pouring ourselves out in service;  
    that spirit of bearing another's burden.  
Give us your spirit this, and every, day.





God in Community, Holy in One,  
may our hearts beat as one with your heart.

Tomorrow, on Valentine's Day, take time to reflect with a tree that is special to you – one of the trees where you live, a tree from your memory of your childhood home, a tree from a place where you minister or ministered, a tree from the scriptures or a book which is precious to you. Listen to the tree – hear God speak to you in this meeting place, this place of revelation as you ask the tree of Earth to teach you.



***Mosaic: Tree of Life***