

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 10 July 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

The readings in the Liturgy of the Word for the fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time have an almost mystical rhythm. Moses, speaking to the people in the reading from Deuteronomy, reminds them that God's word is not too hard for us to follow or too far away from us to understand. Rather, he says, "The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deut 30:14).

Psalms 69 tells us that God's word is given in an "abundance of steadfast love" (Ps 69:13). The psalmist sings passionately to our confidence in this abundant love and mercy, "Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me" (Ps 69:16). God will answer us, rescue us, protect us, let our hearts revive, and save and rebuild our cities.

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, deepens that confidence when he assures us that Jesus the Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:15-16). He then goes on to say, "in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19).

These first readings from the Liturgy invite us to follow God's word, assure us that we will find the way to do so in the ordinariness of our everyday lives, comfort us with the message of God's abundant steadfast love and abundant mercy, and then give us that added assurance that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell, the firstborn of all creation. Now the parable that Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Luke makes these messages clear in a simple, startling story that answers the questions the lawyer asks. How can I love God with all my heart and with all my soul, and with all my strength? How can I love my neighbour as myself? Indeed, who is my neighbour? Jesus answers the lawyer's questions and our own same questions by vividly describing for us the unfolding of five moments in mercy in response to an act of violence.

You know the story so well. A man lies beaten by the roadside. A priest and a Levite see him, but they walk past him. A Samaritan sees him and cares for him, bringing him to a nearby inn to allow him time to heal. How can we see these five moments of mercy in this simple story?



Seeing contemplatively – the storyteller repeats three times "when he saw him." The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan each see the beaten man. Of all three men, the Samaritan would be the most likely not to stop since he was a foreigner in the land of Judah and would likely have been blamed for beating the man if anyone saw him. But the Samaritan is the only one of the three who sees him through contemplative eyes. The Jesuit, Howard Grey, says that contemplative seeing means, "Allowing the heart to be touched profoundly by identifying with the nameless ones, allowing our vision to change us."

Having a compassionate heart – when the Samaritan sees the beaten man through contemplative eyes, "he was moved with pity, with compassion." There is a beautiful Sanskrit word for "compassion" which comes to us through Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions – दया

daaya. Its literal meaning is “suffering in the suffering of all beings.” One of the titles for God in the Old Testament is The Compassionate One (God, the mercifully compassionate One, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them – Ps 78:38). In the Quran, God’s name used at the beginning of every chapter except one is *Allah, Ar-Rahmaan – the Most Compassionate One, Ar-Raheem – the Most Merciful One*). In most of the miracle stories about Jesus in the New Testament, we are told that Jesus “was moved with compassion” (“A leper came to Jesus begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’” – Mk 1:40-41).

Mercying – contemplative seeing and a heart moved with compassion lead the Samaritan to care for the beaten man, bandaging his wounds after pouring wine and oil on them. The Jesuit, James Keenan, describes it in these words, “Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.” In another parable, this time from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes mercying in explicit ways, “I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and you took care of me, I was in prison, and you visited me (Matt 25:35-36). I was Earth broken and abused, and you cared for me.”



Building circles of mercy – the Samaritan did not care for the beaten man by himself. He went to the innkeeper and asked him to take care of the man, beginning to build a circle of mercy. But he widened that circle of mercy by using the fruits of Earth, the wine and oil, to tend the man’s wounds. He used his donkey to carry him to the inn. He uses the road to find his way to the inn. In one of the Hindu Vedas, we see this beautiful expression of all beings within the circle of mercy, “O God, scatterer of ignorance and darkness, grant me your strength. May all beings regard me with the eye of a friend, and I all beings! With the eye of a friend may each single being regard all others!” (Yojht Veda, XXXVI,18)

Now the answer to “Who is my neighbour?” becomes more complex than we had imagined. My neighbour is not only the one who lives closest to me, the one who looks and thinks most like me. It is the one who may be most unlike me – in my race or my colour or my faith tradition or my gender or my way of seeing the world or my abilities. It is the other-than-human beings – the animals or insects of fish or birds or flowers or trees or bodies of water or hills and mountains or plains. Christ is not only the firstborn of all humanity; he is the firstborn of all creation, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The joy of this new understanding of “neighbour” is reflected in the theme from the Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy in 2021, “Mercying: Imaging the Face of God in All Creation ~ Misericordiando: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación.”

What are the circles of mercy that you help shape today?
 Who joins you in these circles?
 Whom do you invite – who invites you?
 Do you welcome a stranger into your circle?
 Are you invited into circles of mercy
 that you would never have imagined in the past?
 In which circles, do you find healing?
 In which circles, are you a source of healing and compassion?
 Where are the circles of mercy which you share with Earth?



What is the newest circle of mercy that has brought you much joy?
What are the circles which you dream about shaping in the near future?

Creating a culture of mercy – Jesus gives us the fifth moment in mercy in his last conversation with the lawyer, asking him, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Lk 10:36). The lawyer answers, “The one who showed him mercy” (Lk 10:37). And Jesus concludes the teaching, speaking to the lawyer and to each one of us, “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that it is not enough to tend to the beaten man. We must ensure that such violence is prevented in the first place, “On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey of life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”



Der barmherzige Samariter

Paula Modersohn

To create this culture of mercy and compassion, we need to think and act locally, globally, and cosmically, in Veronica Lawson's words, “Cosmic thinking invites us to focus not just on the human characters from different cultures and social strata in this story, but also on the neighbourly animal, on the fruit of the vine and of the olive grove and on the silver, coins formed of material derived from cosmic activity, extracted from the earth and ultimately engaged as signs of compassionate neighbourly love. It invites us to reverence all of creation and the Creator of all that is.”

As we reflect on these five moments of mercy, Pope Francis cautions us and comforts us in our reading this parable, “All of us have in ourselves something of the wounded person, something of

the robber, something of the passers-by, and something of the Good Samaritan.” During this coming week, take time to see yourself in the wounded person, in the robber who attacked him, in the priest and in the Levite, and in the Samaritan.

We conclude our reflections today with words from the spiritual writer, Judy Cannato, in her book *Fields of Compassion* that simply yet profoundly tell us what a culture of compassion looks like:

Compassion changes everything.

Compassion heals.

Compassion mends the broken
and restores what has been lost.

Compassion draws together
those who have been estranged
or never even dreamed they were connected.

Compassion pulls us out of ourselves
and into the heart of another,
placing us on holy ground
where we instinctively take off our shoes
and walk in reverence.

Compassion springs out of vulnerability and triumphs in unity.

May God's words of steadfast love and abundant mercy be in our mouths and in our hearts all the days of our lives.