

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 29 January 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Our God is a shocking God. Jesus is a shocking Son of God. We as Christians are called to be shocking disciples of our God. Today's readings for the fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time starkly remind us of these truths.



In the first reading from the prophet Zephaniah, we are introduced to the phrase “a people humble and lowly” (Zeph 3:12), the *anawim* (*anawah* is the Hebrew word for “humble”). They are the remnant who will survive, the ones who will seek righteousness and humility, who will utter no lies or do no wrong. They are not the rich and powerful and mighty, the ones whom society deems to be successful, the ones who are held up as examples to follow. This is what is shocking about our God – that the humble and lowly ones, the *anawim*, are the examples for all of us to follow. In the verses of Zephaniah following

those in today's reading, we learn that God not only chooses and protects the humble and the weak, but God delights in the *anawim*, “God will rejoice over you with gladness, will renew you in love; will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival” (Zeph 3:16-18).

Psalms 146, the first of the set of five psalms which concludes the book of Psalms, deepens this shocking behaviour of our God. Note how each verse begins with “The Lord.” It is as if the psalmist cannot believe that this is happening – “**the Lord** executes justice for the oppressed, **the Lord** sets prisoners free, **the Lord** opens the eyes of the blind. . .” Can you even imagine – the Lord favours the ones who are humble and lowly, the ones who are poor, the ones who are suffering or strangers! They are the ones whom God chooses to protect and uphold, the ones whom God chooses to love.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, is also startled by God's behaviour. He says, almost in disbelief, that God calls people who were not wise, not powerful, not of noble birth, but weak, low, despised. In doing so, Paul says that “we do not boast in the presence of God, but we boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:28, 31). Imagine being able to delight in knowing that it is in our brokenness and vulnerability, in our lowliness and weakness, God is present to us, God chooses us, God delights in us. We are reminded of the words from the song *Anthem* by Leonard Cohen:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

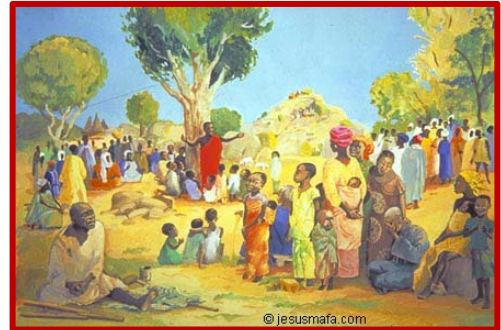


Paul is clear in his words to us that we are not passive recipients in our humility and weakness. Rather our mission in our vulnerability is to re-shape our world to become a world of peace and justice, in which all are included, valued and respected – in his words, “shaming the wise, the weak, the lowly and despised” (1 Cor 1:27-28). The American minister, Terry Hershey, says, “The ordinary moments of every day (even those that confuse us, unnerve us, or break our hearts) are hiding places of the holy. Where the sacred is alive and well. Where hope grows. Anxiety and

vulnerability are real, yes. But the answer is not to chase vulnerability away. It's the opposite. My vulnerability is the signal that I am human, with the capacity to be stretched, to give my heart, to be broken, to cry with those who break, to spill good."

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus MAFA

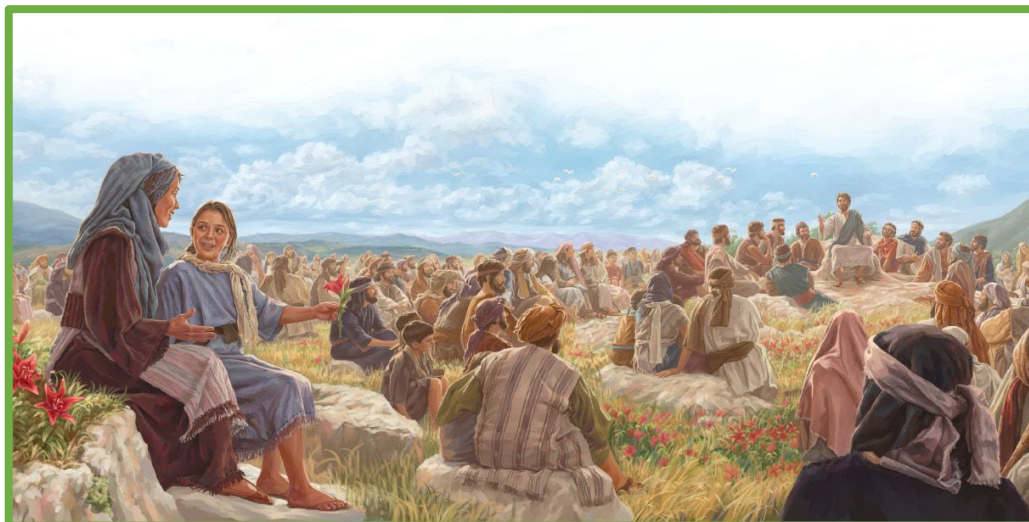
In the reading from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus brings all of these teachings together in his "Sermon on the Mount" in a reflection which we name the beatitudes. He begins with the echo of the *anawim*, "the poor in spirit. . . those who mourn. . . the meek" (Matt 5:2). He goes on to echo the ones on mission to re-shape our world, "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. . . the merciful. . . the pure in heart. . ." (Matt 5:6). He concludes by naming the cost of daring to be humble, gentle, meek in a world dominated by power and privilege "you are persecuted. . . reviled. . . have all kinds of evil uttered against you" (Matt 5:10). Echoing the passage from Zephaniah, Jesus' words end with "Rejoice and be glad" (Matt 5:31).



Elaine Wainwright rsm helps us read the beatitudes through an ecological lens:

Jesus sees the crowd, a simple statement that links him to the human community, and he goes up the mountain, reminding readers that all that is human takes place in a context, a material context. This context in particular is rich in symbolism. Within Israel's religious tradition, mountains are places of encounter with the divine, for Abraham (Gen 22:2-19), Moses (Ex 19:1-6) and many others. The text states explicitly that Jesus sits down on the mountain – on the earth itself, which acts as an authorising agent for what takes place there. . . The righteousness or right ordering [present in the blessings] is to characterise Divine, human and other-than-human interrelationships. Within them, ecological and social justice meet and embrace. However, right ordering needs to be worked out in each unique location and community, each habitat and ecosystem. In so doing, those hungering and thirsting for right relationships will be satisfied.

The repetition of the Greek word *makarioi* (translated "blessed are") reminds us of the Psalms which are marked by repetition and which overflow with God's blessings. Veronia Lawson rsm reminds us, "For Israel's lyricists, God's favour or blessing is on those whose hope is in God, on those whose delight is in God's way, on those who take refuge in God, on the guileless in spirit, and on those whom God forgives."



The spiritual writer, Jan Richardson, continues the theme found in Paul's letter and in Jesus' words that we are not passive in our humility and gentleness, "To be blessed is not a static state. There is a dynamism within the word *blessed*: it implies an ability to be in the ongoing process of recognizing, receiving, and responding. To be blessed is to enter a kind of pregnancy: to take Christ in, to let him grow in us, to bear him forth, then to receive him and bear him yet again in our acts of mercy, of compassion, of solidarity, of love."

Lest we begin to take the beatitudes for granted because they are so familiar to us, Pope Francis challenges us to find new ways to live them (and the teachings in our other three readings today). In a homily given in 2016 in Switzerland, he added these for our reflection in the midst of the realities our own time:

- ❖ Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others, and forgive them from their heart.
- ❖ Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized, and show them their closeness.
- ❖ Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover God.
- ❖ Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.
- ❖ Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.
- ❖ Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.

All these are messengers of God's mercy and tenderness, and surely they will receive from God their merited reward.

The Presbyterian minister, Thom Shuman, helps us reflect on the "foolishness" and the joy of today's readings:

In the intricacies of a spider's web, an OS designer is put to shame.
In the songs of a meadowlark, talk show hosts are stunned to silence.
In the practical joke played on Easter, death is knocked off its lofty perch.

In the foolishness of your salvation, God of tenderness,
you bring us new life.

In your execution as a common criminal, rather than dying as a hero;
in sticking your foot out to trip the wise, so the unaware can go to the front of the line;

in sharing your kingdom with the outsiders, while the boasters fall strangely silent,
your foolishness in becoming human, Servant of the Blesseds, transforms our lives.

In those words which offer hope to the despairing,
in the quiet whispers which fill the emptiness of all who yearn for righteousness,
in the gentle songs which can comfort those whose hearts overflow with grief,
you are foolish enough to teach us to speak, Wisdom of God's Heart,
not with sophisticated logic, but the simple language of grace.

Continue to call us to foolishness, God in Community, Holy in One.



How do you see blessing in your own life and in the lives of your community and the Earth beings around you? How do you see you, in your brokenness and gentleness and humility, as blessing for all who share your life journey – human and other-than-human? Blessed are the poor in spirit, the kin-dom of heaven is theirs!

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 05 February 2023
The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Tasting and seeing – these two precious senses are gifts from God, gifts we use to relate to our God (“Taste and see that the Lord is good” – Ps 34:8) and gifts we use to relate to one another (as we learn from Jesus’ parables in today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew).

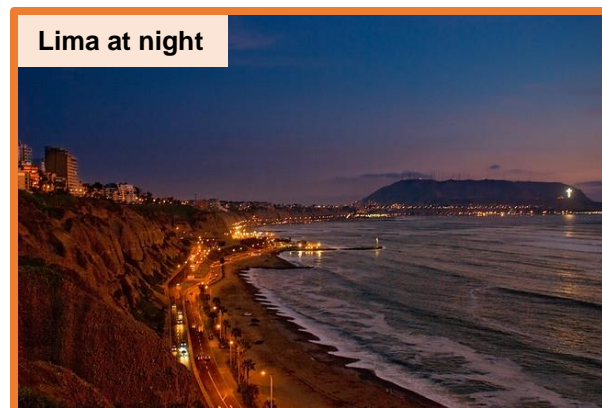
You are the salt of the Earth (Matt 5:13) – with these words, Jesus does not tell us to endeavour to be or seek to be the salt of the Earth. Jesus tells us that ***we are the salt of the Earth***. In ancient times as today, salt was highly valued – it was used for seasoning food, as a preservative (for meat, fish and olives), as an essential element in making cheese, as a disinfectant, in curing leather and glazing ceramics, in creating medicines, and in temple offerings. It comes from the Earth, refined from the interaction of water and the sun.



In the book of Numbers, we read about “a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and your descendants” (Num 18:19). In the letter to the Colossians (4:6), we are told, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” Veronica Lawson rsm tells us, “To be salt of the earth is to season the earth community, to intensify its beauty, to be wise in one’s judgments, to be just and compassionate in all of one’s dealings.” In a simple prayer-poem, Steve Garnaas-Holmes echoes Veronica Lawson’s words:

You don’t aspire to saltiness.
It is who you are.
It’s the taste of being an element of earth
and an element of God.
Your saltiness is your faithfulness
to who God is in you.
The You of who you are
gives salt to this world.
It’s a quality that remains
even as it goes out into the stew of life
and adds to its savoriness.
Be true to your salt.
It will bring out the goodness in others.

You are the light of the world (Matt 5:14) – in his second parable in the text, Jesus speaks to being a city built on a hill and to being a lamp on a lampstand in the house, from the glow of a large city to the glow of a single household. In the book of Genesis, we are told that light is the first of God’s creations, “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good” (Gen 1:3-4). The



book of Isaiah is filled with images of light shown as God's way of restoring the people to new life:" O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! (Is 2:5); "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined" (Is 9:2); "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Is 60:1). In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we are told about Jesus, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn 1:4-5). Jesus says of himself, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12).



But we are also told in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, that we are called to be light for the world. In today's reading from Isaiah, the Lord tells us that if we do certain things, "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly" (Is 58:8) and "your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday" (Is 58:10). And in this parable from Matthew, Jesus goes even further and says that **we are the light of the world**. Again, in another prayer-poem from Steve Garnaas-Holmes, we see this privilege God gives us of being lights for the world:

Every act of justice,
every act of compassion or mercy
is a light, a star in the night of this world.
You may think your efforts small and meaningless.
You may think they make no difference.
But go out and look up at the stars.
Which one should not have reached out in love?
Which one should never have bothered
to act in courage and compassion?
They all shine until they are swept up
in the great light of the One who dawns among us.
None of them rids the night of its darkness.
Yet God walks out and looks at them all and smiles.

Salt and light – to be salt and light is to be transformed into our truest selves, to be fully the ones whom God has called us to be. Pope Francis reminds us, "It's curious: both salt and light are for



others, not for oneself. Salt does not give flavor to itself; light does not illuminate itself." Our first reading today from Isaiah tells us explicitly what being salt and light means – loosing the bonds of injustice, undoing the thongs of the yoke, letting the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke, sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your house; covering the naked, not hiding from your own kin, removing the yoke from among you, satisfying the need of the afflicted. Psalm 112 repeats the same themes: being gracious,

merciful, and righteous, dealing generously, lending conducting affairs with justice, distributing freely and giving to those who are poor.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul gives us even more comfort when he reminds us that we can do all of this, we can be the salt and light that God expects us to be, even when we are in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. It is then that we have confidence that our faith rests “not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:5).

And so, we conclude with yet another prayer-poem that echoes this truth, this time taken from the writings of Roddy Hamilton:

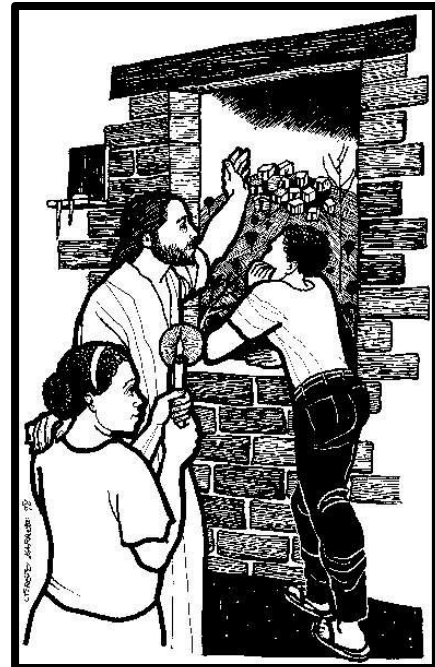
In a world that is always asking us
to become something, someone,
some success story,
In this place we say: don't become,
be who we already are.

Don't become light –
be the light you already are –
this is what God anciently placed in you.

Don't become salt –
be the salt you already are –
it is in this way you are known to God.

For from these elements:
Salt and Light,
God uniquely crafted you.

Don't become anything –
be who you are,
and discover the one who loves you in your be-ing.



Salt and Light, Cerezo Barredo

This week I encourage you to choose one of these elements – salt or light – and reflect on all the ways in which you are salt of the Earth or light of the world every single day. Remember, “Don't become light – be the light you already are. . . Don't become salt – be the salt you already are. . . Don't become anything – be who you are, and discover the one who loves you in your be-ing.”



REFLECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 12 February 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Three scriptures in today's readings from the Liturgy of the Word cause us to catch our breaths, embed themselves in the depths of our hearts: "If you choose, you can keep the commandments" (Sir 15:15), "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you" (Matt 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34), and "Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No" (Matt 5:37).

"If you choose, you can keep the commandments" – Sirach strongly emphasizes that we have the ability to choose to keep the commandments, to act faithfully, to do good or to sin. While



God wishes us to follow the right way, we have the freedom to make other choices. The psalmist adds, "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep God's decrees, who seek God with their whole heart" (Ps 119:1-2). In the Gospel reading, Jesus will explore more deeply with us what making such choices entails, what walking in the way of the Lord means, what seeking God with our whole hearts means.

We need to nuance Sirach's words here with our growing awareness that not all of us have that freedom to choose which God intends us to have. Society has taken away or prevented that freedom for so many – persons who have physical or mental health challenges, persons who have been made poor, persons who are homeless or without social support, persons who are excluded because of their gender or colour or abilities or birthplace or age, persons who are living in places of extreme violence or war, persons who are living in places endangered because of the climate emergency. Part of God's invitation is that we choose to create a world of justice, peace, and healing. In her artwork entitled "[The Dinner Party](#)," the American poet, Judy Chicago, describes how that world would look (*The Merger Poem*):

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come
 to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way
 to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again

"You have heard that it was said...but I say to you" – in Matthew 25, often named the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims the eight beatitudes followed by the passage we read in the Liturgy

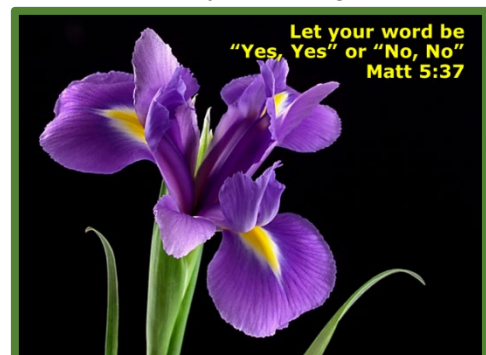


today, examples of ways in which the law and the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures are fulfilled, ways of righteousness. Veronica Lawson rsm summarizes them well, “In a series of cascading sentences, Jesus presents a charter for reconciliation and forgiveness. He reminds his audience that true worship demands a forgiving heart expressed in action. . . any form of sexual depravity is destructive of right relationship. . . Righteousness calls for honesty and transparency in every day dealings.” We not only follow the laws and decrees of our God but, in doing so, we “seek God with our whole heart.”

Thank heavens, most of us would never be guilty of murder, but Jesus asks if the same is true of holding anger in our hearts for those closest to us. Most will not commit adultery, but do we lust for what we should not have? Most of us will never make false oaths, but do we make false promises? Jesus reinforces the Torah, the law of God, as a way of life marked by reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, fidelity, and integrity. Not only are we called to live this way of life, but Jesus reminds us that others see how we live this way – if others see our reconciling, forgiving, and faithful ways, they too will be encouraged to live these ways, and we will be called great in the kin-dom of heaven. In his prayer-poem, “But I say to you...,” Steve Garnaas-Holmes summarizes Jesus’ words so poignantly:

Jesus takes the law up a notch—
or, really, down: down into the depths:
not just what you do but why,
who you are in the world.
To not merely avoid murder,
or even anger, but to truly honor people.
To place your relationship with God
in your relationship with others.
To not merely avoid adultery or even lust
but to truly be faithful with another person.
To not merely avoid over-grand promises
but to be a person of profound integrity.
This is the grace of God, after all, toward you,
who has vowed to love, honor and cherish you.
Let the grace well up from within,
for the true law of God is pure joy.

Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No” – Jesus’ last words in today’s passage focus on integrity. Say “yes” if you mean “yes.” Say “no” if you mean “no.” How simple and easy this sounds, but how challenging it is in our everyday, ordinary living! We are tempted to say what people want to hear. We do not want to disappoint or upset our family members or loved ones. We are afraid that we will sound naïve or uncertain. We do not want to cause a fuss or be seen as an outsider. We learn to speak without being really clear, to be silent when we should speak, to find ways to get around having to give voice to something that others will find unpleasant.



In calling us to say “yes” if we mean “yes” and “no” if we mean “no,” Jesus does not invite us to be arrogant or self-righteous or controlling or presenting “my” truth as the only truth. Rather Jesus invites us to do what the psalmist pleads with us to do – walk in the way of our God, seek God with all our hearts. Speaking with integrity means speaking from the wisdom that comes from living in right relationship with each other, with ourselves, with Earth, with our God. As Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians, it means speaking from wisdom that “is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age,” but it is “God’s wisdom, secret and hidden” (1 Cor 2:6-7). Such wisdom is shaped over time as we live the reconciliation, forgiveness, and fidelity that Jesus describes earlier in the passage. Such wisdom leads to the world of inclusion that Judy Chicago describes.

The Presbyterian minister, Thom Shuman, gives us a touching prayer-poem on making choices:

Mothering God,
you nurse us with the milk of blessing and joy,
so we may grow in faith to feast on grace and hope.
You plow the fields of our hearts,
planting the seeds of love,
so we may be your people.
We hold fast to you, God of Choices.

You provide the road made
for our journey, so we will not wander
down blame’s alleys.
When we choose sides by our quarreling and cliques,
you reconcile us to each other
with your words which are true.
We hold fast to you, Jesus of Reconciliation.

Blessed with the fresh breeze of your presence and
power,
we will continue to follow you,
trusting that you will lead us into making the right choices
as the disciples of Jesus.
We hold fast to you, Transforming Spirit.

God in Community, Holy in One.

This week let us take time to reflect on holding fast to our God of Choices, to Jesus of Reconciliation, to the Transforming Spirit, to our God in Community, Holy in One. May we grow in the wisdom that finds its expression in reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, fidelity, and integrity. May we grow in the wisdom that finds its expression in a more just, more peaceful, and more inclusive world. May we hold fast to you, God of Choices.



REFLECTIONS FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 19 February 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Abundant affirmation ~ astounding expectations: these two themes flow through our readings on this seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, the last Sunday before we begin our Lenten journey.

Abundant affirmation: three of our four readings today astound us with their strong affirmations very much in the spirit of God's words in the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, "God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'. . . So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God God created them; male and female God created them" (Gen 1:26-27). In two short verses, four times we are told that God creates humans in God's image and likeness.

In our reading from Leviticus, God again speaks, telling Moses, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says twice, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you. . . For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16-17). Jesus echoes the affirmation, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Created in the image of God, we are holy, we are God's temple, we are perfect.

We note that, in Matthew, the Greek word *telos* is translated as "perfect," but a better translation of *telos* is "completion, intended goal, or determined end." The sense meant here is that we would live into the complete person God calls us to be, that we grow into our truest selves just as God

lives into God's truest self. The Lutheran pastor, David Lose, says it well, "Be the person and community God created you to be, just as God is the One God is supposed to be. Jesus' words are less command than promise. God sees more in you than you do. God has plans and a purpose for you. God intends to use you to achieve something spectacular. And that something spectacular is precisely to be who you were created to be and, in so doing, to help create a different kind of world."



As Lose says, God, Jesus and Paul are not so much commanding us as promising us that we already are holy because God is holy; that we are already God's temple because God's Spirit dwells in us, that we are already perfect when we are the persons God created us to be. This is God's promise to us; we are the ones who choose whether to accept God's promise and gift.

Astounding expectations: how then do we choose to accept God's promise and gift? Our readings help give us the answer to that question. The reading from Leviticus (which will be quoted by Jesus when he gives us the Great Commandment) tell us, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18), reminding us that this means not hating in our hearts any one of our kin (think carefully what this may be saying to you!), not taking vengeance, or not bearing a grudge.



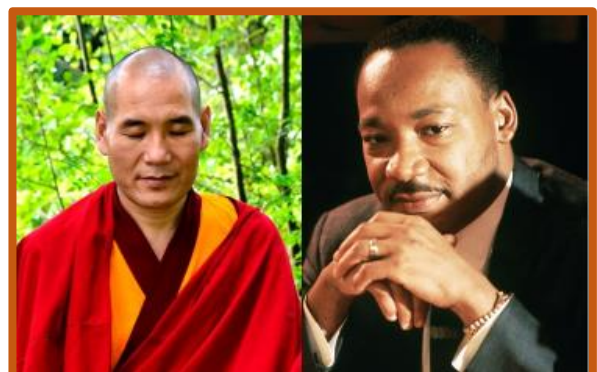
Psalm 103 (one of the best known and most used of the psalms of thanksgiving) shows us how God is as God is supposed to be and, therefore, how we who are created in God's image are to be: forgiving iniquity, healing diseases, crowning with steadfast love and mercy, being merciful and gracious, being slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, not dealing with others according to their sins, having compassion. The number of times steadfast love, mercy, compassion, and graciousness are repeated in these few verses sends a strong message of what is at the heart of our being holy, being God's temple, being perfect. It is noteworthy that the psalmist here is repeating the description which God gives Moses of Godself in Exodus 34. It is the most repeated description of God in the whole of the Old Testament. There is little wonder that Pope Francis reminds us, "God's name is mercy!"

Jesus' words, in Matthew's Gospel, are part of what we name the Sermon on the Mount (a conscious echo of Moses' words at the covenant-making at Sinai). The phrase from the Mosaic law, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt 5:38), was an advanced interpretation of law. It stated that the punishment for any violation of the law had to be proportionate to the violation and would be the same whether you were a powerful leader or a lowly peasant.

Now Jesus further advances that interpretation. The strict application of the law – the same application no matter what your status in the community, and the fair application depending on the violation – are taken to another level. Veronica Lawson rsm says it well as she concludes that Jesus is inviting us "to embrace a new way of thinking about and acting towards those who have injured them or us. What happens to us may be beyond our control. What we do with what comes our way is for us to decide. Jesus makes it clear that we have choices in the face of life's struggles. The disciple is called to assume personal responsibility and to refuse the way of retaliation. There are to be no limitations on love."

To be holy, to be God's temple, to be the one God calls us to be means that strictly obeying the law is not enough. All of us will see possibilities in our own lives to live what Sister Veronica interprets Jesus to mean, "Praying quite deliberately for those who give me a hard time or cause me grief is by far the most effective way of retaining my own peace of mind and of expelling retaliatory thoughts. It is a matter of gently bringing these people to mind, of breathing in the loving kindness or hesed of God that suffuses the universe and of breathing it out to them. Such prayer enables me to think of them in kindly ways and act towards them without rancour, even when these sentiments are not reciprocated."

There is a wonderful story told about the Tibetan monk, Phakyab Rinpoche, who had been tortured in a Chinese prison for twenty-two years. When he reached Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama asked him: "What were you scared of the most in prison?" He replied: "I was afraid that I might lose my compassion towards the torturers." This Buddhist monk fully exemplifies who Jesus is inviting all of us to become. Martin Luther King, Jr. echoes the same understanding when he



stated, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

The Scottish minister, Roddy Hamilton, says the same thing in his poem-prayer as he reminds us that Jesus is "love's rebel":

The enemy: love them
The oppressor: walk the mile with them
The Master: turn the other cheek to them
This doormat faith seems too much to bear
in a world where those who bully always seem to win
The enemy: imbalance them with love
The oppressor: shame the law that oppresses
The Master: turn the cheek as an equal
This rebellious faith seems too much to bear
in a world where those who bully are loved back to justice by the bullied
But this is heaven's revolution and we are called into it
come let us worship love's rebel, Jesus

Such abundant and astounding affirmation of what God not only creates us to be and expects us to be but actually trusts us to be is a previous foundation for our Lenten journey which begins on this coming Ash Wednesday. The Presbyterian minister, Thom Shuman, gives us the impetus to begin this journey with confidence and honesty:

Here, at the outer limits of Lent, we are called to walk:
to the paper-thin edges which cut us to the soul;
to the workplaces which weary us; to the people who confuse us;
to the faith which threatens us.

Here, at the corner of Steadfast Love and Faithfulness,
we are called to wait: when our clenched stomachs awaken us;
in the moments of unbearable sorrow; with the angels who would carry us.

Here, where time is fulfilled,
where God's Kin-dom is as near to us as our neighbor,
we begin Lent:
with the Beloved, whose tears wash away our fears,
with the God who will not let go of our hands.

Let us wholeheartedly and gracefully begin Lent: "with the Beloved, whose tears wash away our fears, with the God who will not let go of our hands."

