

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 09 July 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Gentleness and **compassion** – these two threads are woven through today’s readings in the Liturgy of the Word in this “ordinary” time, and they are woven in the most unexpected ways! They describe our God, they describe Jesus, and they name the potential in every one of us who are made in God’s image.

In the first reading from the book of Zechariah (probably written after the people of Judah return from exile in Babylon) describes the victorious and triumphant king who will “cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem” (Zech 9:10). Surely this will be a mighty king



who controls the people and demands subservience. But the description shows a far different image. The king first appears riding not on a great steed but on a donkey (the least pretentious of all mounts) and, even more startling, on a baby donkey (Zech 9:9). And the king is described not as mighty but as humble, lowly (Zech 9:9). We know that all four Gospel writers took this image (including the baby or young donkey) and applied it to Jesus in his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem before his passion, death, and resurrection.

This humble king comes to bring peace – peace for all Earth from sea to sea and from the great River to the ends of Earth. The gentle king strives to ensure that compassion covers the whole world, and he does so by his very way of being.

The psalmist extends this theme of a compassionate leader to God who “is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and God’s compassion is over all that God has made” (Ps 145:8-9). This God is faithful in words and gracious in deeds, upholding all who are falling and raising up all who are bowed down (Ps 145:14). This gentle compassionate God not only brings peace to all that God had made (Ps 145:9) but attends in a special way to those who are falling up or bowed down.

The passage from Matthew’s Gospel reminds us yet again that Jesus knew his Old Testament. He takes the two themes of gentle presence and compassionate response in a most intriguing way. He first reminds the disciples and all of us that God has hidden wisdom from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to “infants” (Matt 11:25), explicitly telling us that this is the Father’s “gracious” will (Matt 11:26). Jesus then takes the description of Woman Wisdom from Sirach (6.26-31) to show how he invites us to turn to him when we are “weary and carrying heavy burdens” (Matt 11:28). He assures us that he will then give us “rest”. Veronica Lawson rsm beautifully describes what that “rest” will be:



The “rest” that Jesus offers is God’s rest. It is not just relief from drudgery and hard work. In the biblical tradition, rest is *shabbat*. It is freedom from any sort of enslavement. It is freedom to remember God’s goodness in creation. Rest time or *shabbat* is about making a space to contemplate the wonder of the galaxies, the wonder of life in all its forms and all its potentialities. God’s rest restores life to our wearied spirits. It frees us to open ourselves to ever new possibilities and to be there for others.

Here we find the advice that Jesus gives us about how we live in the image of the God who creates us, “learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29). The theologian, Gerald Darring, helps us connect the way of being of the king-messiah in Zechariah and the way of being by which Jesus the Messiah describes himself:

The world looks for strength in power, the ability to control others. It looks for strength in wealth, the ability to own and accumulate possessions. It looks for strength in developing advantages over others, such as superior education and prestigious positions. Revelation presents a different picture. It introduces us to a messiah who is “meek, and riding on an ass.” It wants us to believe that our strength is in a man whose boast is that “I am gentle and humble of heart.” It praises God for contradicting the wisdom of the world: “for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever you have revealed to the merest children.”



Jesus goes on to give us even more startling advice when he tells us to “Take my yoke upon you,” with the consoling words that “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29, 30). What is this burden, this yoke, which Jesus asks us to take on and to do so with a gentle and humble heart? Each one of us carries burdens, often unknown even to those who are closest to us. And we all carry the burden, the responsibility, of restoring creation. Pope Francis constantly tells us how we will find the wisdom to understand and carry these burdens, “May the humblest

and highest of creatures implore from God wisdom of heart for us, so that we may discern God’s signs in our lives and be participants in those mysteries which, hidden from the proud, are revealed to the humble.”

This week, I encourage all of us to see our own yokes and burdens through the lens of this reminder from Jesus that our burdens are his burdens, his yoke is our yoke. The only way to bear these burdens and carry this yoke is through a gentle and humble heart. Dare to see in yourself this gentle and humble heart!

One other response that the psalmist and Jesus agree is essential is a spirit of gratitude. The psalmist tells us, “All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you” (Ps 145:10). Jesus says, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Matt 11:25). Be mindful during your day of these moments when you give thanks, those moments when you especially need to give thanks, and those moments when you are given thanks for your goodness to others.



Thom Shuman, the Presbyterian pastor, gives us yet again a poem-prayer that brings these themes of gentleness of being and compassion of action lived in the image of our God the Creating One, Jesus the Saving One, and the Spirit the Teaching One:

When God could stomp feet and yell, God tiptoes into our hearts to whisper mercy.
When God could play favorites, locking others out of the house,

God holds wide the arms of love to embrace everyone.
When God could break promises, going back on every word given,
God picks up those we trip on the way to success,
and cradles the lonely and frightened.

We sing glad songs to you, God of early mornings.
Because your heart is as broken as ours, you tear down dividing barriers,
you bring an end to polarizing speech,
you send forth all who hold open their arms to welcome the forgotten.

We shout from the rooftops of our hearts this day, Jesus who is velcroed to us.
For you are the One who comes to rescue us,
riding in a refugee boat on the open seas,
holding hands with children at border crossings.

We lift our voices in praise to you in these moments, Spirit who is our teacher.
You are the One who points us in the direction of little kids at play,
those who easily change the rules of games to include everyone,
who ignore the complexities of adults and live out kindness, love, and grace.

Hear our voices, our songs, our hearts, our longings, God in Community, Holy in One,
even as we pray as your Beloved Community.

Hear God tiptoeing into your heart to whisper mercy. Feel the Jesus who is velcroed to us. Watch the Spirit who reminds us to learn from the children who can change the rules of the game to include everyone.



God tiptoes into our hearts to whisper mercy