

The 21st Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 24)
October 17, 2021
The Rev. Jedediah D. Holdorph
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Isaiah 53:4-12
Psalm 91:9-16
Mark 10:35-45

Church building closed due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic: the church is open at www.trinitybend.org.

*At this morning's 10 am service, the Bishop's Address from this year's Diocesan Convention will be streamed in lieu of a sermon at Trinity. **

At the 10 o'clock service later this morning, our bishop's annual address to the Diocesan Convention will take the place of my sermon. I'm not showing it here, though, because (a) it's a bit longer than I'm comfortable with indoors here and (b) it would require a big TV screen.

And in the meantime, this morning, let me share what I took to be the heart of what he had to say ... and tie it back to what we just heard in this morning's gospel.

I'll start with the gospel. It's another moment when Jesus' disciples show just how obtuse they can be. James and John know what Jesus has said about the road ahead. But they don't get it. And so, instead of letting Jesus take the lead, they ask Jesus for seats of honor, for extra favors. They ask for the kind of safety and security they expect from power and prestige. If there are going to be winners and losers in this life, they want to make sure they win in the end.

And when the others hear what they had asked, they get agitated and they get angry. We're not told exactly why. Maybe they wish they had asked first. Maybe they're just appalled. Either way, I sense a lot of anxiety. Everyone's anxious: James and John, yes; and the other ten, as well.

Jesus doesn't exactly chastise any of them. But he does encourage them to find another way, to step back from their schemes and scheming and to step into another way of being in the world.

* The Right Rev. Patrick Bell addresses the Diocese of Eastern Oregon's 51st Diocesan Convention @ https://youtu.be/Zvcy7DRZ_t8.

It's definitely a countercultural invitation. Stop your striving. Don't turn life into a game of winners and losers. Be content with the daily opportunities provided for you simply to live as a beloved child of God. Be willing to love every person you'll ever meet as another child of God.

That's a somewhat different reading of this morning's gospel for me. And I thank Pat Bell, our bishop, for getting there.

In his annual address this year, Bishop Pat reminded us that (in recent years) our diocesan conversations have returned to the understanding that we live "On Sacred Ground." The phrase calls to mind the people who have lived here since before Europeans moved in and took the land away. They talk of the earth as "sacred ground." And their way of seeing the world challenges us to be better stewards of God's good creation.

Bishop Pat expressed disappointment that the pandemic doesn't allow for us to deepen this conversation. But the pandemic is something we can't control. We have been buffeted these past 19 months – the surge in cases, the loss of life, the uncertainty, the economic and social and political upheaval. The upshot of it all, is that we have replaced, in his words, "our wonder and awe in the mystery of what is around us and who is around us" with an all-consuming anxiety.

And that's where I hear an echo of this morning's gospel. The reasons for our anxiety and fear are different for us now that it was for the disciples, but the countercultural prescription is the same: step back from that which is not serving us well and step into a saner way to live.

I'll leave the bishop to say the rest entirely in his own words:

I have one simple message that I would like to impart for you in the midst of this ... and that is encourage you to step away from the anxiety that is enfolding you and step in instead to those places of [wonder and awe]. And one those most obvious places for that is for us to step back out into the sacred ground, into that outdoor space in which we enter into as one of our eucharistic prayers says, "this fragile earth our island home."

... take some time this fall [to] step back out into the wonder and mystery and awe of Mother Earth; to raise your eyes to the mountains; to step your feet into those crunching, fallen leaves; to listen to the babble of that local, clear brook; to watch the sunset.

Take time to enter into the awe and wonder of God's creative beauty and begin to look also to one another for the awe and wonder of that look in a person's face or maybe as I got to do yesterday, looking into the eyes of our youngest grandchild who just turned five, and her sheer joy and abandon in celebrating her fifth birthday with those who love her ... she had no anxiety. I got a moment to see life anew through the wonder of her eyes.

We need to take time for that. Stepping outdoors, spending time letting Mother Earth heal us, is one way. Spending time with positive people, with positive effects, with looking for the wonder and the majesty in human action and love. That's what I encourage you to do. That's what I invite you to do.

It's time to put ... anxiety aside because it kills us. It destroys us ... Our lives cease when we stop experiencing the joy of wonder and awe ... I think part of that [is] just getting our heads up, quit looking at what's dark and foreboding and remember that there is such a wealth and abundance of goodness and beauty in life, in one another, and in all that God holds for us.

My friends, I hope you will grab hold of that. I hope that what we will experience as we come through this next winter ... will bring ... a sense of wonder and delight, and let that enrich you and let that give you new life ...

I love the psalmist who says, "And I look to the hills from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord." We in Eastern Oregon are blessed with lots of hills. Mountains of great majesty, of delight and wonder and mystery. Lift up your eyes. Look out into the hills, and know that God will meet us in the wonder.

Bishop Pat closed his remarks with a prayer from a Jewish prayer book called *Gates of Prayer*.

This is that final prayer:

Were the sun to rise but once a year we would all cry out, "How great are your works, oh God, and how glorious." Our hymns would rise up, our thanks would ascend. Oh God, your wonders are endless, yet we do not see. Give us new eyes, oh God, restore our childhood sense of wonder ... Give us, oh God, vision to see the world anew. And we will give thanks, as we have been blessed so shall we give blessing. Give us understanding, oh God. Help us to know we are blessed. Amen.