

Reflection for Sunday, February 13, 2022

Beloved Community

Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord, and on his law 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 (Psalm 1).

We sing of a church seeking to continue the story of Jesus by embodying Christ's presence in the world. We are called together by Christ as a community of broken but hopeful believers, loving what he loved, living what he taught, striving to be faithful servants of God in our time and place. We sing of God's good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ, creation's mending. We sing of God's mission (Song of Faith).

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Let us pray:

Creator, Timeless, Loving God. We gather to worship knowing that you are with us. During this season of Epiphany, we journey the path that Jesus travelled between his birth and the start of his ministry. We come to learn as he learned, with open hearts and minds. We come to understand our place in your world as Jesus learned to understand his place in this world. Give us the courage to take our place and to travel the path with Jesus. Amen.

In the midst of social and political turmoil, Jeremiah contrasts those who trust themselves and those who "trust in the Lord." Those whose

trust is in God are like trees that bear fruit. A tree planted in the soil of trust is planted “by the water.” It sends out its “roots by the stream” so “it shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green.” When drought comes, “it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.” Trusting in the Lord means a renewing source of nourishment is always available. Even in the midst of the drought—when all else seems hopeless and a tree in itself may appear helpless—its roots receive needed nurture from the stream that gives life to the tree. The “invisible” resources sustain, even when, to all outward appearances, disaster seems imminent. The “leaves” shall stay green”; the actions of the human heart that trusts in God will continue vitally, in ways pleasing to God, because the heart trusts in the living Lord.

God is concerned with the inner life and also with outward actions that express the inner heart. Social and ethical actions—even when the just and right seem endangered by surrounding evils—continue because they are nourished by the life-giving God who ensures that this trusting heart “does not cease to bear fruit.” Jesus made it plain that “you will know them by their fruits.” Our outward actions express our inner heart.

Jesus is clear: the things with which we fill up our lives often leave us empty; and when we are left empty by a disregarding world, God will fill us up with that which sustains. Are you going to be eternally full in God’s kingdom, Jesus asked, or are you going to be full and satisfied in this world? If you hoard the world’s goods, then you will have already received all you’re going to get for your efforts—emptiness. There is a better way, Jesus said.

Rev. Marc Andrus shares the never-before-told story of the friendship between Martin Luther King Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh—icons who changed each other and the world. The day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, Thich Nhat Hahn wrote a heartbroken letter

to their mutual friend Raphael Gould. He wrote: “I did not sleep last night. They killed Martin Luther King. They killed us. He made so great an impression in me. This morning I have the impression that I cannot bear the loss.”

Only a few years earlier, Thich Nhat Hanh had written an open letter to Martin Luther King Jr. as part of his effort to raise awareness and bring peace to Vietnam. There was an unexpected outcome of Nhat Hanh’s letter to King: the two men met in 1966 and became not only allies in the peace movement, but friends. This friendship between two prophetic figures from different religions and cultures, from countries at war with one another, reached a great depth in a short period of time.

Dr. King nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. He wrote: “Thich Nhat Hanh is a holy man, for he is humble and devout. He is a scholar of immense intellectual capacity. His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.”

The two men bonded over a shared vision of the Beloved community: a vision as “a nation and world society at peace with itself.” It was a concept each knew of because of their membership within the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international peace organization, and that Martin Luther King Jr. had been popularizing through his work for some time. Thich Nhat Hahn took the lineage of the Beloved Community from King and carried it on after his death.

These men did something crazy by the world’s standards, but they lived the reality of the Beatitudes. They gave us a living parable of how to shine Jesus’ light to the whole world, entering into the fullness of God’s kingdom with hands and hearts wide open—and empty, but full.

Bill Cantelon