

## THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 12C)

*Colossians 2:6-15, Psalm 138, Luke 11:1-13*

July 24, 2016

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley Episcopal Church, Los Olivos, California

The Rev. Randall C.K. Day, D.Min.

---

---

# I know where I've been

Loving Creator, revive your Church in our day, and make her holy, vibrant, and new, for the sake of your faithfulness, we pray in Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior. Amen.

*Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England*

Linda Burrows has found – and will share with us in a few minutes – the song from the musical *Hairspray* called *I Know Where I've Been*. You'll find the lyrics in your service leaflet and they include:

There's a road we've been  
travelin'

Lost so many on the way

But the riches will be plenty

Worth the price, the price we  
had to pay

And later in the song, “we hear of a dream in the future” and the “risks and challenges” it will take to see it.

We hear this song in the midst of the rising anxiety we are experiencing globally after years of terrorism, war and other intensifying global fears related to population, the environment, the economy, politics – and our own local experiences of loss and change, and our personal

experiences that reshape our lives in ways we haven't anticipated and generally can't. Again this week, the violence expanded, including, just recently, Orlando, two disturbing events in Baton Rouge, St. Paul, Dallas, Nice, and Munich – an attacker apparently fixated on mass killings. Also this week, we sense, perhaps with some dread, the continued intensifying of our rhetoric-heavy campaign season, itself a symptom of underlying, acute reactivity in our society...

And we hear in the gospel reading today this teaching of Jesus to pray... which, may or may not be our first impulse.

I'll remind you again that the word “precarious,” defined as “dangerously likely to fail or collapse” has, at its root, the word *precāria* – prayer. So precarious situations call for prayer.

And while that may be the

sort of thing you'd expect to hear at church and that any of us, as people of faith, might go along with – and likely something we actually do – it seems, perhaps, not enough – maybe too passive or too Pollyanna (illogically optimistic).

I'll offer three things about this gospel passage:

First, let me point out that Jesus speaks of persistence in prayer, not a kind of benign “arrow” prayer – but prayer that digs in despite opposition or discouragement, that perseveres in the unlikely season – such as this. One commentator speaks of this persistence as praying shamelessly – boldly audaciously....

Second, in our tradition we define prayer as “Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.”

So our prayer may need to be less mental or verbal – offering up some words, hands folded and eyes closed – then waiting for God to answer or not answer – and more living and acting in prayer, being, ourselves, expressions of our constant connection and relationship to the very heart of God.

And third, when things aren't going our way, to realize that Jesus, our exemplar in the faith, the one who reveals God's presence and action to us, prayed and then was horribly tortured and killed.

Defeated.

But then resurrected.

And is with us constantly seeking new life in the least likely, most deadly situations.

We live in this pattern personally, individually as well as all together as a faith community – and living out our humanity in the world with all other people (including those fixated on mass killing).

Fr. Richard Rohr reminds us of the centrality of faith and trust – saying that Jesus praised faith and trust even more than love. He says: “It takes a foundational trust to fall or to fail – and not to fall apart. Faith alone holds you while you stand waiting and hoping and trusting. Then, and only then, will deeper love happen. It's no surprise at all,” he says, “that in English we speak of ‘falling’ in love. I think falling is the only way to get to authentic love. None would go freely, if we knew ahead of time what love is going to ask of us.”

About a month ago I shared with you some thoughts by Dr. James Doty, the Stanford neurosurgeon when he was interviewed by Krista Tippett on her *On Being* radio program.

He says, “I appreciate that every day, I have the capacity to, through my actions, improve the life of at least one person. And what we forget sometimes is even smiling at another person, which takes very little effort, for that person who

receives that, it can mean an immense amount. And not to forget that these small, little actions, these little ripples, can actually end up creating a tsunami if each of us engage in them.”

He says, “Remember, when a person — and we know this from the science — when a person sees another person engage in a positive behavior, they are many, many times more likely to engage in that behavior themselves. When they see another person act with kindness, and with generosity, and with gratitude....”

Dr. Doty concludes saying, “We are at the beginning of an age of compassion.”

“...as you know, we had an age of enlightenment, which had a profound effect on our human species. And I believe that ... the positive effect, of compassion in little pockets in society and how profound it can be ... as we manifest these little pockets of compassion and caring for the other, it is ultimately going to be recognized that this is the path that will lead us out of darkness into light.”

The light in the darkness that Linda will sing about in a bit — the light that shines in the darkness that we hear about in Advent and at Christmas — that is persistent, shameless, audacious, and takes actual, lively form in what we do.

As the song says: we know where we’ve been — and where we

are. We cannot avoid what challenges us in these violent days, this season of uncertainty and instability — and all the seasons of uncertainty, instability and vulnerability we experience in this precarious endeavor called “being human.”

All of this, by the way, underscores why it is critical for our faith community as a whole — not just parents — to commit to and engage, participate in our work of faith formation and nurture for our children and youth — of which we will speak a bit at our parish Brunch-nic after the service....

The Risen Christ invites us to be persistent in prayer, in prayer as action in ushering in a new age of compassion, beginning, perhaps with a smile, a single act of kindness — and to be tenacious in all seasons to win that promise through the faith and trust we have, by God’s grace, the light, burning bright.