

WALKING AROUND SHINING LIKE THE SUN

Almighty God, give us reverence for all creation and respect for every person, that we may express your likeness in Jesus Christ our Lord.

From Additional Collects, Common Worship, The Church of England

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 40:21-31, PSALM 147:1-12, 21C, 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-23, MARK 1:29-39

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ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MARK 1:29-39

Jesus left the synagogue at Capernaum, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The following is a passage from *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* by Thomas Merton.

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking

from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream.... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.... I have the immense joy of being [hu]man, a member of a race in which God... became incarnate.

As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now [that] I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.... Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.

“... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of *absolute poverty* is the pure glory of God in us.... It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.”

In this passage, Merton is revealing the reality of the True Self (as contrasted to the False Self) as well as the vision of God in Christ, seeing all of humanity with unending, undying love. Fr. Richard Rohr summarizes by

saying: our *attachment* to our small, separate, false self must die to allow our True Self—our basic and unchangeable identity in God—to live fully and freely. This is what Jesus taught in speaking of dying to ourselves or losing ourselves to find ourselves.

Other spiritual traditions affirm this movement from you and me to us – giving up the stories in our heads about ourselves for what is real.

There's a paradox that we encounter in various ways in our lives and in our life in community, as we do in Baptism today. Leilani Marlea Maly, an actual person with a specific name, embraces her reality as Christ's own forever, takes up being part of Christ's Body, the Church. It is Leilani who is engaging her True Self, it is she who is an expression of God's basic and unchangeable identity.

I have written about this paradox in relation to our commitment within this faith community, saying that “**you are essential to St. Mark's**. A community is not formed in abstract or of general ‘units’ – but of very specific individuals. YOU. And you. And you.” And you and you and you and me gives way to **us**.

The paradox is also in the gospel reading today. While we don't know all the complexity of what had side-lined Simon's mother-in-law, we find: “[Jesus] came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.” A very specific person, but not isolated, not polarized, not beyond the specific attention and touch of God. Jesus saw her as a part of the **us** of **all** – who were his life and ministry, **us** who **are** the whole human

endeavor.

And that definition of **us** that was constantly in flux in the life of Jesus we also see in this gospel reading: “That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door.”

The whole city....

So a very broad definition of “us.” Not a little churchy, narrow, rigid, institutional anything.... [the whole “city” of human life!]

And then, after his time alone, Jesus said: “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; *for that is what I came out to do.*” And he went throughout Galilee....

Last Sunday, you may recall, I offered you another Thomas Merton quote from his book *Seeds of Contemplation* (1945). Merton wrote: “To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that Love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name.”

I was surprised on Wednesday to have a few moments of experience in a supermarket that reminded me of Merton’s encounter on 4th and Walnut in Louisville, when I looked up at someone and heard in my head: “his name is Love” and then everywhere I turned and saw another person, again and again “her name is love,” “her name is love,” “his name is love....”

It is apparent throughout the gospels that Jesus did not see “you, the

demon-possessed” and “me, the holy one of God,” or “you, in bed with a fever,” and “me, the savior of the world.” For Jesus it was always **us...** perhaps capital “U” and capital “S” – **US** all of humanity – always, even now, for Jesus.

So baptism, Leilani’s baptism today, the baptism we each affirm today, is God’s re-assertion of our wholeness, of our participation in God’s whole life, in the totality of reality, of our True Selves.

Baptism asks us always to recall that renewed definition of the word “repent” offered by John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg: “**go beyond the mind that you have.**” Leave aside the chatter of the false self, always needing or wanting something more, something else.... **This is all.**

Life in God, the life of the spirit constantly invites us to go beyond the mind we have... to enter ever more fully into our True Self, into who we are in God’s eyes, into being the point of light, the little point of nothingness and of *absolute poverty* that is the pure glory of God in us... like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven.

And so it was in this gospel reading today in the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law. *How can we know that?*

It’s a brief phrase in the reading, but, in a sense, says everything. After Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up we find: “Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

She didn’t simply return to a routine. What we realize is Simon’s

mother-in-law had already discovered her True Self.

Do you recall that Jesus said: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Truly Human One came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:41-45) For Jesus, True Self and service are one.

So Leilani, as part of the **us** of humanity, as we all are, is drawn into service, service that is not an occupation, not something to do in our spare time, but is the essence of the life of the True Self.

Fr. Richard wrote this week of how that might look, as none of this is theoretical or ephemeral – it isn’t a “thought” or “belief” in our heads. Fr. Richard describes service in the words of the Beatitude from Matthew: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice: for they will be filled.”

So, again, this is not a program, but living, in and out, the life of the True Self.

He urges: **“join a grassroots movement that fights one or two issues of injustice and get deeply involved in the struggle. Since all issues of injustice are connected, fighting one injustice puts us squarely in the struggle against every injustice. ... Befriend the victims of systemic injustice, side with them, listen to their stories, let their pain break your heart, join the movements to end injustice, [give] your money [your time, your skill] to the**

cause, and commit yourself to the struggle....”

In our context these days at St. Mark’s we are faced with and embracing the reality of the injustice that some of those billions of points of light, of True Self, that are around us, that are **us** in essence, are hungry, are food insecure.

So these days, to be **us** is to be part of a food fight, a fight or struggle for everyone in our region to have food, a struggle headquartered in a community kitchen, which, like any kitchen, brings people together, connects **us**. We are being raised up by God in Christ to **serve** as Simon’s mother-in-law was raised up and naturally returned to service and as Jesus served and serves still.

As he said simply: “for that is what I came out to do.”

As we welcome Leilani to the food fight, to life as **us** here, to all she will encounter as Christ’s own forever, we heard that amazing passage from Isaiah his morning: “... those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

And so we have confidence in coming together in the face and blaze of a sun, knowing our name is love, serving the world in *every one* day by day, embracing the manifestation, the concrete expression of service, for truly, in our True Selves, *this is* what we have *all* come out into the world to do.