Where there is no love

put love

**and you will be able**

**to draw out love**

*~ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS~*

Enfolding God, Trinity of love, you are our source, our goal, our life: may we be born again in you no more to live alone and disconnected, but sharing in the Spirit’s breath and carried to your heart; through Jesus Christ, who lifts us up.

from *Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare*

MAY 30, 2021

**THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: TRINITY SUNDAY**

*Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 29, John 3:1-17*

St. Mark’s-in-the-Valley

Episcopal Church and Preschool

Los Olivos, California

The Rev. Randall C.K. Day, D.Min., Priest and Rector

MAY I speak and may WE HEAR from THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD

who is CREATing, REDEEMing, AND sanctifying US.

"If we want to see God in **the world**, all we have to do is see **the world**." That is a quote from a character in a new novel by Daniel Hornsby, called *Via Negativa*. It resonates with a thought offered by Martin Buber, the 20th century Jewish mystic and philosopher, author of the enduringly influential essay *I and Thou*. Buber said: "One who truly goes out to meet **the world** goes out also to God."

And both of these counsels resonate with what Jesus reveals in today's gospel reading: "If you don’t believe when I tell you about **earthly** things, how will you believe when I tell you about heavenly things?" And, the skull-rattling re-direction of the heavenly minded: "God so loved… **the world**… as to give the Only Begotten One." And, "God sent the Only Begotten into **the world** not to condemn **the world**, but that through the Only Begotten **the world** might be saved."

Richard Rohr teaches about the 20th century Christian mystic, scientist and priest Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).

...for Teilhard, gravity, atomic bonding, orbits, cycles, photosynthesis, ecosystems, force fields, electromagnetic fields, sexuality, human friendship, animal instinct, and evolution all reveal an energy that is attracting all things and beings to one another, in a movement toward ever greater complexity and diversity—and yet ironically also toward unification at ever deeper levels.

So, for Teilhard, to look at the world, the very real scientifically measurable world, is to look at love – love the energetic foundation of all reality, truly the character and essence of God.

I want to say again what my favorite passage is in the *Book of Common Prayer* – and then, for the first time, to contradict it.

The phrase is on page 298 and also has my favorite word in the prayer book: Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble."

This passage is saying one only needs to be baptized once. I like that it is an action God takes – no matter how much we feel we have invested in it, Baptism is God's work and (favorite word alert) that work is "indissoluble."

So, my new-found contradiction is partial, but crucial.

As we move in the world, as we see the world, we re-enter the experience of Baptism over and over again – not exactly "re-baptized" – but hard to live off the difference in the moment….

And for seeing the baptized life – of individuals and of baptismal communities like St. Mark's-in-the-Valley – somewhat more clearly, I'm thankful for the teaching of Ron Rolheiser, who is a Canadian author, theologian, Roman Catholic priest and monk, and teacher.

He speaks of baptism as consecration.

Typically consecration is setting aside something for a particular use or purpose – one could say, at times, for a *peculiar* use. Whatever is consecrated may remain the same as it was (*may*) but its function is different.

So some examples are church buildings – which are like any other buildings but are consecrated to serve the world through being a church. Lots of things in a church are also consecrated – like altars or bells or vestments – though the actual consecration comes through using the building or altar or vestments for their intended purpose.

Deacons, priests, and bishops are consecrated – set aside for their special use and purpose – but like altar appointments, find their consecration in being and doing what they are meant to be and do.

And, so, yes, Ron Rolheiser speaks of Baptism as consecration – being set aside to see the world – to truly see it. And then to respond from love and in love with what God loves – as part of the very body of God.

So the baptized are not loved more or less than any other element of creation or any other person in humanity, but set aside for what God gives us to be and do in the world.

And here I want to first mention a brief sentence I ran across in the work of St. John of the Cross recently. John writing in a letter in 1591: "Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love."

There's the essential interconnection between seeing and doing for those consecrated in baptism.

But, again, baptism may arise over and over and over again as you, as we move, (truly) seeing, through the world. And our consecration in baptism, which has its roots in infinite love, will also draw us into suffering and into costly responses.

It takes us where we may not, often do not want to go.

Ron Rolheiser cites the passage in John 21 in which Jesus repeatedly asks Simon Peter: "do you love me?" Peter responds three times that he does. And then Jesus concludes saying: "The truth of the matter is, when you were young, you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you get old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put a belt around you and take you where you don’t want to go.”

So, again, baptism is rooted in God's love, and then likely takes us where we don't want to go.

To put a fine point on what is at hand in our baptism, I offer you this next passage from Ron Rolheiser's writings: "In the early 1960s, in New York City, there was an infamous murder. A woman was stabbed and murdered in Central Park while more than 30 people watched from their apartment windows. None of the onlookers called the police. They did not want to get involved.

"Later, after this came to light, there was a debate as to how guilty these innocent onlookers really were. Were they not somehow guilty because they saw the murder and did nothing about it?"

Rolheiser says: "For a Christian the answer is clear. Seeing that woman being stabbed consecrated them, set them aside, displaced them, and derailed them from normalcy. At that moment, they lost their freedom and were conscripted to act.

"If you look out of your window and see a person being stabbed in a park you are, in that instant, baptized and consecrated in the true meaning of those words. Up until that time, you put on your own belt and walked where you liked, but now, seeing this, someone has put a rope around you and is taking you to where you would rather not go."

He concludes: "Tragically, that night, in New York, more than 30 people resisted their baptism. A woman died as a result."

So, from this, we may not want to get involved, but ***we are involved*** in **the world**, we are consecrated to see and to be and to act in ways that derail and displace us from "normal" – whether our actual normal or a normal we wish we had.

Ron Rolheiser also uses the example of parenting and how after a birth, for the next 25-50 years: "every time a parent turns around, a number of tiny and not so tiny hands will be stretched out, demanding something of them – their time, their energy, their money, their car keys, their understanding, their hearts." And the stress and suffering of that daily baptism – or reassertion of their baptism – changes, transforms them, draws them into a more profound wholeness in themselves and oneness with God.

We do not leave our baptism in the font. It comes with us and rises up in us and around us both when we might imagine but in times we can't imagine and probably want to avoid.

As we emerge from this COVID season, we have seen a lot of **the world** and, still, to see God in the world, it is our baptismal life calling us to **see the world even more** truly and deeply and to not imagine that we are not involved. We are involved.

In George's baptism today, he joins the cohort of all the baptized, consecrated, derailed and displaced from normalcy and compelled to act in a love that is often anything but a warm, fuzzy feeling. That is the welcome we extend to him as his community today.

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"One who truly goes out to meet **the world** goes out also to God."

"If you don’t believe when I tell you about **earthly** things, how will you believe when I tell you about heavenly things?"

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