

The sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
Feb 13, 2022
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Towanda, PA. 18848

Light despite the darkness

Come Holy Spirit and visit the hearts of your faithful people. Send forth your breath and we shall be created and You shall renew the face of the earth. Amen

Our gospel passage today from Luke is also known as the sermon on the Plain. Much like the sermon on the Mount from where the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) come from, his teaching is comprised of blessings bidden and cautionary woes.

In between the space of last week's reading - the fishers of men, Jesus has healed a leper and a paralytic much to the dismay of the Pharisees, and needless to say plucking corn on the Sabbath and collected around him the disciples whom are now named apostles.

Alot has gone down. He collected together the disciples in the presence of the crowds for this public teaching. He has made a recent

display of healing and teaching which disrupts the status quo. Here we witness a reorientation occurring which sets the groundwork for ministry moving forward in following Jesus. Jesus is turning the world upside down. There is a reorientation of focusing on the poor and marginalized. There are blessings for the poor, the hungry, the ostracized, and even enemies.

Our orientation as Christians is tied to his teachings which were on the plain. Our blessings and woes not unlike the first followers of Christ. The woes are not necessarily curses, but cautionary queues of discernment.

Both the OT lesson from Jeremiah and the Psalm echo from the retrospective path, the same cautions for trusting God. Our lesson is reinforced by our identity in the Kingdom of God who brought forth his Son. We can attest to the fact that belief is not a static thing but an ongoing intention which includes trust, faith and redemption. Jeremiah was warning Judah not to trust in military alliances and powers in the Babylonian era.

In our frightening times, how do we hear Jeremiah's message. The political news and posturing of world powers in our day is terrifying, complex, manipulative and confusing to say the least. What would Jeremiah be saying at your dinner table?

It is no accident that we include world and church leaders in our prayers of the people, asking guidance and depending on that guidance in our petitions to work towards a common wellbeing for all of humankind.

This is not without sacrifice, sin, and suffering. Yet the primary lens of our functioning should be our baptismal identity in Christ through God.

Trusting in God allows Him to search our minds, bodies and souls.

This week past I was listening to a podcast featuring a scientist who had a conversion experience based on the writings of CS Lewis.

CS Lewis' articulations of faith were written in the 1940's. Many Christians know of him. He fought in WWI in the British Royal Air force and gave a series of wartime broadcasts on Christian faith delivered

over a 2 year period which were collected into a book called *Mere Christianity*. Speaking to other men in the force, facing enormous risk and danger, his intention was to speak to the problems of suffering, evil, and pain. ¹

His addresses became a revelation to Dr. Francis Collins retired director of NIH witnessing to his faith alongside his identify as a scientist. Collins remarks that most scientists are thought to be atheists. He himself had settled into an atheists view of the world....until that is, his third year of medical school. It was at that time, when he became aware of the limitations of medical interventions with suffering and dying people. Tools and technology have their limits, he discovered.

Collins became aware that although people died, many had an unwavering confidence and hope which was a result of their faith. One day he was asked what he believed in! This came from a patient...the question threw him into an existential quandary. He had never though

¹ C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* - Broadcast Talks on Christian Behaviour and Beyond Personality pp.xvi-xvii

about this before. His answer came from a new perspective which dawned on him after reading C.S. Lewis' book.

Ultimately, Collins found a faith that informed his science. Friends and colleagues countered that a human brain could not entertain both perspectives. I am certainly not a scientist on his level, but one nonetheless who can tell you that like him, I completely disagree.

While I am aware that many consider the complexity and thrust of science to be an odds with religion I am so inspired by the incredible gift of grace that has benefitted mankind through science. God has gifted our human capability to progress in medicine and technologies, to advancing diagnostics with RNA and DNA platforms. Cancer therapies, Covid vaccines, just recently a vaccine for malaria and ardent strides in Sickle Cell disease are astounding advancements.

And yes, I believe that God delights in this AND participates in the inspiration and dedication of those who have brought this into the world wide medical arena.

My friends, these gifts offered to the human challenges of our day are a gift of God instituted by the humans via God's own creation. This is my take and I'm sticking to it. God operates in particular and specific ways. Many of us experience this particularity in our daily secular lives. Think of a time of serendipity or that aha! Moment. Was it coincidence?

So many people have prayed for a solution. We've been given one through God's grace and a lot of human work..an answer through God's people albeit not easy, not disrupted, nor subverted.

One of our truest callings, Collins asks is how [in the Pandemic] do we look out for one another? He learned from CS Lewis' writings that a Christian realizes that any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside of us. God does not love us because we are good, but God made us good because He loves us. By being in Christ, we are not merely mental or moral, but Christ is operating through us, the whole mass of Christians are a physical organism - we are His fingers, muscles and cells of His body. New life is spread not only by mental acts of belief, but by bodily acts like baptism, Holy Communion.

Jesus' promises express a morality grounded, not in humanity, but in God and known to those committed to Jesus Christ. His promises invite participation now on behalf of those in need. To live as a community of resurrection means to be people of forgiveness, to be people who participate in the ongoing life in Christ with hope of eternal life.

Desmond Tutu said: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness"

My friends, live with this resurrection hope and let this be the primary light in all of your life.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning , is now an will be forever, world with out end. Amen.
