

Free Speech

Rev. Alan Claassen

December 4, 2016

The Guest House

Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Matthew 3:1-6

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

In the year 2000, while I was an Interim Minister at Cedar Hills United Church of Christ, in SW Portland, I began what I called a five-year Vision Quest. My vision guides were the faculty of the University of Creation Spirituality, founded by Matthew Fox, where I was a student for five years, taking one or two week-long classes a year. At that time I recognized that I needed a spiritual practice that would nurture healthy habits that I wanted in my life, namely: believing in my gifts and rejoicing in the gifts of others; eating good food and thoughts; focusing my energies; setting an expectation of quality work that was within my abilities; making the effort to acquire the materials, information, and skills that I needed to do the work that I was called to do.

I was searching for a spiritual practice that would enable me to whole-heartedly engage the passions of my life, which are my family, my music, and my desire to make the world a better place. One of my teachers during those five years was Sister Jose Hobday who taught a class on Native American Rituals. Sister Jose Hobday was a woman with Seneca and Iroquois ancestors as well as a Sister in the Franciscan Order. She lived on a reservation in Arizona. This morning I want to share with you the tools that Sister Jose Hobday gave to me on my Vision Quest. Before doing that I want to assure you that I am in fact reading the Scriptures for Advent, and I believe with all my heart that what I am sharing with you about Sister Hobday is excellent Advent material.

How *do* we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace? How do we pray in such a way that our daily experience is transformed into a pathway of freedom for all people and for our Mother Earth in this, the darkest time of the year? To prepare for the coming of the Christ Child is to empty ourselves of our fears and doubts and remember who we are, and what history we claim as we move into the future. It is, as Rumi says, a time to welcome the light and the dark, for what it may awake in us, or shake loose in us, so that the Christ Child may be born within us and be borne by us.

Advent is an excellent time for contemplative prayer and repentance (which means literally, to *turn around* from a path that is headed in the wrong direction and head back home). Let me tell you what Sister Jose Hobday shared with the class about prayer. She began the class by recalling a significant event in her own life, in which she was literally forced to let God in. When she was around the age of twelve, at her Colorado home awaiting the arrival of a friend, Jo, as she was called then, became impatient and complaining. Tired of his daughter's attitude, Jo's father told her to pack a book, an apple and a blanket, and join him in the car. He drove her to a desert area and left her there with instructions to shape up before the day was over. Young Jo promptly threw her apple, book and blanket into a canyon and stomped around until she realized she wasn't getting anywhere. Then she retrieved her belongings and sat under a tree where she ate the apple. Gradually, her anger lifted and she took a more objective look at her behavior. As she grew more peaceful, she became aware of the presence of God with her at that moment, in that place, and of the beauty of the world around her. When Jo's father came back later that day, he found his prodigal daughter with a changed heart. Sister Jose Hobday frequently returned to her desert experience as a refuge and reminder of God's overpowering love and the happiness one finds in solitary prayer.

Sister Jose said that prayer is "... a conscious, willing invitation, an alert welcoming of God into anything we do. ...Anything that transports us – a sunset, a flower, a child" can be a prayer if we don't hold back our openness to the Holy Presence. The hardest part of opening ourselves to the natural flow of prayer and prayerful moments, Sister Jose believes, is "waking up" to the reality of the spiritual, "to stay awake and not be lulled into spiritual complacency."

I learned from Sister Jose Hobday how rituals help us to stay awake, keep our lamps trimmed and burning, prepare the way of the Lord, and all that other good Advent stuff. Rituals help us return to what we need to remember to stay awake and be alive. The three rituals I want to share with you now all have to do being alive.

3 steps into the day

Begin with a breath and observe the day you are stepping into. Then take the first step with gratitude, take the second step into the self, and then the third step into the unknown, the mystery of God's presence.

Blessing of the children before school

Sister Hobday shared with us a ritual that her mother did with the children before school. Her mother would take an eagle feather, which represents our higher calling, and would tap on one shoulder and bless the child with beauty, then the other shoulder, and bless the child with strength, then the head, and bless the child with wisdom, and finally a gentle "slap" on the face with the eagle feathers, to remind the child to be careful out there.

Storytelling

Sister Hobday shared with us the importance of storytelling in Native American spirituality. The way in which she approached it was unexpected, because she did not tell us stories about crow, or raven or fox and how fire was captured. She told us to be good storytellers when telling the story of our own lives and to look for the stories happening around us.

When someone asks you how you are or what you have been doing, use your imagination when you answer that question. Believe that you have an interesting story to tell, and that there is nothing wrong with a little embellishment. Reveal who you are in conversation with others, with enthusiasm and honesty. This requires self-reflection, self-knowledge and paying attention to ourselves and the things that come our way. And perhaps most importantly it calls for healthy self-appreciation. I am a child of God, wonderfully made, and this is how my life reveals that. Always be on the look-out for miracles, for the Holy Presence in all things.

The Franciscan in Sister Jose Hobday said, "Jesus is my teacher. He is the master in affirming people and downplaying the negative. Jesus would never go after little people – the suffering, the misunderstood, the put down or cast out." After people are convinced of their own goodness, of the love of God that permits deep union in prayer, Sister Jose said, they become aware that Jesus expects

action on a few fronts. ... You have to make choices. You have to embrace reality, put your arms around all of life. Then you gain the capacity to discern what is healthy, what is unhealthy. Some things you accept, some you live with, some you reject, but such discernment is not possible from people who don't know life.

Sister Jose Hobday knew life; she knew how to tell a good story, how to live a good story, and she knew how to pray, just as the Lakota people, in their non-violent action at Standing Rock know how to pray and to protect the water and listen to the land. We have been called this day to pray for the Water Protectors who want to stop the laying of an oil pipeline beneath a river on their lands, their sacred lands. This is a request that has been sent to all people of all religious faiths from Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of White Buffalo Calf Pipe Bundle.

Pray with Us on Sunday, December 4, 2016 at Oceti Sakowin Camp

The hearts of all people's faiths must now unite in believing we can change the path we are now on. We, from heart of Turtle Island, have a great message for the world to unite for our children's future. Already we have witnessed that many nations of life are now dying because of contamination: those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, the plant nation, the four-legged, and now the two-legged.

We are asking the religious people to come and support our youth, to stand side by side with them, because they are standing in prayer. If you can find it in your heart, pray with them and stand beside them. The police department and National Guard would listen to each and every one of you.

This is a very serious time we are in. I know in my heart there are millions of people that feel this is long overdue. It is time that all of us become leaders to help protect the sacred upon Mother Earth. She is the source of life and not a resource. In a Sacred Hoop of Life, where there is no ending and no beginning.

I would like to invite us to pray this morning by singing a song written by Melanie DeMore from Oakland, entitled, "Standing Stone."

I will be your standing stone. I will stand by you.

click here for a video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YminLnyYU5w>