

Reconnecting with the Symphony of All Things

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Inspired by Chapter 7 of
The Rebirthing of God by John Philip Newell

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-10

Editor's note: The following is based on Alan's outline and notes which he used to deliver his message. It is not a transcription of that message, but contains elements which offer insight and inspiration.

Sandra Weil

*The universe is so amazing that it must have been dreamt into being.
Ecological degradation so desperate that we must dream our way forward.*

– Thomas Berry

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

– Albert Einstein

Carl Jung, a modern prophet of the unconscious asked: How do we access the soul? How do we get beneath the surface of things? His answer (in short) was: through dreams, intuition, imagination, and exploring our shadows (that part of us that we have rejected for one reason or another, but which contains hidden treasures).

There is a deep river of images that is accessible to all humankind. They connect us with the “symphony of all things.” The opposites need each other: masculine/feminine; east/west; spirit/matter; moonlight/sunlight; organism/organization. Sadly, we have separated what God has joined together.

The ego sees itself as the Center, desires control. That doesn't work. How can we let go of our need to be in control and allow ourselves to be embraced by God?

John Philip Newell asks: How do we dream the Christian story forward, allowing our imagination to draw from the living well? How do we keep it flowing forward, rather than creating a dam which says “all forward motion stops here”? putting ourselves back where we were 20 or 50 years ago? And I ask: How do we live the story of our lives? How do we make of our lives a work of art?

What are the dreams that Christianity has received? Among them are:

Each child is sacred, cared for, loved.

The commandment that we care for the least among us, that we welcome the stranger, the other.

Death is not the end of the story; people rise up.

Love is stronger than fear. Hope is stronger than despair.

Carl Jung invites us to share not only the memories and dreams of ancestral traditions, but also the memories and reflections of the events of our own lives. On my two-week vacation and study leave I went to visit my father and brother in Katy Texas. My father is 92 years old, and he beat me in golf! While I was visiting, we celebrated my birthday, and my brother surprised me by remembering that my favorite cake is German chocolate. It had been over 45 years since I'd had a birthday party with my family.

At Morro Bay Betsy and I saw sea otters with their pups on their bellies, elephant seals, so free in water, so heavy on land. We visited the Asilomar Conference Grounds, a place I first visited while in seminary 35 years ago. Memories have a way of helping us see the distance that we have traveled, not so that we can go back there, but so we can remember that we are capable of traveling a great distance.

Reflections on resistance. Matthew 5:10 refers to fighting oppression.

Matthew 5:1-10

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven.

When I ask myself how long we can keep up the resistance to the Trump Administration (though “administration” seems too kind a word), I realize how long people of color have not lived with that choice. How long women and gay, lesbian, and trans people have lived with that struggle. They do not have a choice of how long they will be involved in the struggle against oppression. It opens me up to what I have not been conscious of, and taps me into that which is common to all humanity, all life. And like the wisdom of the Beatitudes, this awareness of suffering and an awakened response enables me to get to a “thin place” where I can see the presence of the Holy.

The Beatitudes reveal the compassion of God, the Sacred Presence for creation. Our needs and our sufferings and our dedication to noble and just causes like peace, also awaken us to the “symphony of all things.” They help us remember that we serve the Center, but we are not the center.

There are many ways to read the Beatitudes. The most important thing is not that we just read them, but that we live them, that we live into them; that we see them not as a “to-do” list, but as a “to see” list; namely, to see what God is doing and what we are called to do; that we see them not as a list of things to achieve, but as windows into the kin-dom of heaven, the beloved community.

One of my favorite poetic translations of the Beatitudes comes from South America:

*Blessed are the poor; not the penniless, but those whose heart is free.
Blessed are those who mourn; not those who whimper, but those who raise their voices.
Blessed are the meek; not the soft, but those who are patient and tolerant.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice; not those who whine, but those who struggle.
Blessed are the merciful; not those who forget, but those who forgive.
Blessed are the pure in heart; not those who act like angels, but those whose life is transparent.
Blessed are the peacemakers; not those who shun conflict, but those who face it squarely.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice; not because they suffer, but because they love.*

Other translations:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” becomes “Blessed are those who know their need of the Indwelling Presence.”

“Blessed are the meek” becomes “Blessed who take only what they need, no more.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart” becomes “Blessed are those whose intention is clear.”

The question for Carl Jung is: how do we access the soul? We can do this through the beauty of nature. We can do this within communities of unconditional love. We can do this through memories that provide wisdom for the future. We can commit ourselves to the path of nonviolence, or what Gandhi called soul-force, Kim Stafford called “heroic calm,” and Jesus called *agape*, love for all creation. We can also access the soul through spiritual practice, whether that be centering prayer, walking the labyrinth, singing in the choir, preparing meals for others, filling mattresses with air, or living the teachings, the dharma of Jesus, as outlined in the Beatitudes. We can access our souls by playing well with others, and together asking “What is trying to rise up from the history of Community Congregational Church today? What is coming forth among us a new birth, with a vulnerability that needs protection and a sacredness that calls for celebration?” We can also access our souls by becoming works of art, like Anthony Manago (a 3rd grader), who will be “the wind that blows away from hatred, blowing toward love,” showing others that we are “going in the right direction, instead of the wrong one.”

Amen!