

## **“The Easiest Thing in the Universe”**

Rev. David Gregory

January 30, 2022

4th Sunday after Epiphany



### **Readings**

Jeremiah 29:11

from the New Revised Standard Version

“Surely I know the plans I have for you,” God says, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

“The Worst Thing”

a poem by Chelan Harkin in *Let Us Dance*

The worst thing we ever did  
was put God in the sky  
out of reach pulling the divinity  
from the leaf,  
sifting out the holy from our bones,  
insisting God isn’t bursting dazzlement  
through everything we’ve made  
a hard commitment to see as ordinary,  
stripping the sacred from everywhere  
to put in a cloud man elsewhere,  
prying closeness from your heart.

The worst thing we ever did  
was take the dance and the song  
out of prayer  
made it sit up straight  
and cross its legs  
removed it of rejoicing  
wiped clean its hip sway,  
its questions,  
its ecstatic yowl,  
its tears.

The worst thing we ever did is pretend  
God isn’t the easiest thing  
in this Universe  
available to every soul  
in every breath.

We've been at this thing we call church for nearly two thousand years, and over these many centuries we've done our best to take something that was very simple and self-evident in many indigenous cultures, and to overlay it with a complicated, at times convoluted, system of theology and governance. Our white Euro method of spreading the gospel and civilizing the world has come to a pretty severe reckoning. The truth is we were often better at spreading diseases than spreading the good news of Jesus. Instead of bringing charity and love of neighbor to the shores of the New World, it turns out we often brought the sword of dominance, power, and control, and unfortunately it is a sword that continues to be wielded in the culture wars of the twenty-first century. Our resistance to this domination often increases its fury, and day in and day out, our air waves, news outlets, and social media feed us a steady stream of awful things. We're left with the feeling that the world is a complicated and unfriendly place, that authoritarianism is winning, and that there is little to be done about it. But what if it could be easy?

Over the last twenty years, we've been awash in the statistics. It used to be generally accepted that conservative churches were growing, that liberal churches were dying, that what people really needed and wanted was to have their questions answered, to be told what was right and what was wrong, and to be given a checklist of what it means to be a Christian. But the statistics of the last fifteen to twenty years tell another story. No particular brand of Christianity, but Christianity in general is in decline. The explanation for this trend is complex, but not surprising: We spent the last half of the twentieth century answering all the questions that no one was asking, with the result that younger people see no need for the institutions we have guarded and preserved for them, and those younger people are now missing from the church.

A few years ago I read an article in the New York times titled something like "Your Kids Do Not Want Your Old Stuff." In other words, it doesn't matter what importance we might place on our grandma's wedding china, a dusty old piece of furniture, or any relics of a bygone era. The author's point was that it isn't a loving thing to do hoard all these old treasures, the trinkets that your kids will have to go through and dispose of someday. What if it could be easy?

We like to think that God will bless us with a perfect plan for our life, individually and communally. We were taught to think that "happily ever after" is in the hands of a far-off male white God whose highest heaven is unattainable, lest we submit to *his* authority on earth, which we have called the church. This belief system is an extension of the shallow reading of the Hebrew scriptures that seem to say if you obey God and do what he wants, you can live in a land flowing with milk and honey. If you disobey, you'll spend generations wandering in the desert or be forced into exile by some evil foreign power. The prophet Jeremiah assures us that God has a plan to give us a future and a hope, but with the news channels blaring at us 24/7, it's hard at times to see how that future could happen, and it's difficult to feel any sense of hope at all. But what if it could be easy? Poet Chelan Harkin helps us understand that "the worst thing we ever did was to put God in the sky, out of reach .... The worst thing we ever did is pretend that God isn't the easiest thing in this Universe available to every soul in every breath." Breath. What if it could be as easy as breathing?

Here's a piece of good news. That's exactly how easy it is. This is probably the only message I've shared in a long while that hasn't used the "p" word. You know, the one that starts with "p" and ends with "andemic?" I won't start now, but I'll offer just a little reminder that over the last two years, we've often felt defeated, struggling with what to do next, wondering what is the wise, helpful or loving thing to do, and we haven't always gotten it right. Most of us are not scientists; we're just doing the best we can with the information we have. Sometimes our heads are spinning. But what if it could be easy?

Here we are at the top of Rock Hill, sitting in a place that was envisioned and created over the course of the last sixty years. We've seen times of radical relevance, with hundreds of people attending multiple services. We've seen times of severe conflict and recovering equilibrium. There have been times of hunger and drought, and times of plenty, times where we have experienced the joy of new birth and the pain and sorrow of loss. We've planned and plotted, envisioned and prayed. We've gotten our house in order, and also gotten frustrated with the way it continues to crumble and need our attention, our energy, our focus, and our resources. We've navigated the new world of virtual connection, not because we wanted to, but because we had to.

We now come to a place where we must figure some things out. It's confusing, exciting, and sometimes scary, but what if it could be easy? What if we could take a set of issues and consider them together, as we did last year when the complex relationship between our property and our neighbors' became a source of panic and pain. It was not easy, but over time we found that we could breathe together in candid conversation. We learned that we could share our common concerns and disagree about the solutions, and at the end of the day we could come together as a community and get enough clarity to move forward. Let's remember that the holy dwells in our bones, and that the dazzlement of God bursts from everything we see as ordinary. What if it could be that easy?



*Polaris*  
Martin Wong