

“Getting to a Bigger View”

Rev. David Gregory

May 5, 2019

Third Sunday of Easter



First reading

Psalm 30 from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

I give you all the credit, God –
you got me out of that mess,
you didn't let my foes gloat.

God, my God, I yelled for help
and you put me together.

God, you pulled me out of the grave,
gave me another chance at life
when I was down-and-out.

All you saints! Sing your hearts out to God!
Thank him to his face!

He gets angry once in a while, but across
a lifetime there is only love.

The nights of crying your eyes out
give way to days of laughter.

When things were going great
I crowed, "I've got it made.

I'm God's favorite.

He made me king of the mountain."

Then you looked the other way
and I fell to pieces.

I called out to you, God;

I laid my case before you:

"Can you sell me for a profit when I'm dead?
auction me off at a cemetery yard sale?

When I'm 'dust to dust' my songs
and stories of you won't sell.

So listen! and be kind!

Help me out of this!

You did it: you changed wild lament
into whirling dance;

You ripped off my black mourning band
and decked me with wildflowers.

I'm about to burst with song;

I can't keep quiet about you.

God, my God,

I can't thank you enough.

Second reading

from *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr

Without a sense of the inherent sacredness of the world—of every tiny bit of life and death—we struggle to see God in our own reality, let alone to respect reality, protect it, or love it. The consequences of this ignorance are all around us, seen in the way we have exploited and damaged our fellow human beings, the dear animals, the web of growing things, the land, the waters, and the very air

What I am calling an incarnation worldview is the profound recognition of the divine in literally “every thing” and “every one.” It is the key to mental and spiritual health, as well as to a kind of basic contentment and happiness. An incarnational worldview is the only way we can reconcile our inner worlds with the outer one, unity with diversity, physical with spiritual, individual with corporate, and divine with human.

Those of you who sometimes receive emails from Bill Eichhorn will recognize his signature quote from Wendell Berry: “We live the given life, and not the planned.” I’ve had many plans over the last two weeks, plans that that I would have preferred living out, but instead, I am becoming well-practiced in the life that has been given in place of those plans.

We continue in the Easter season; in fact today is the third Sunday in Easter, a time of renewal, rebirth, fresh starts, new beginnings. We usually think of those things in the context of pretty flowers, Easter eggs, and celebrations. For me, this Easter season is about a different kind of renewal, one that involves a cleansing, a purification, or what feels a little like a trial by fire. I did not come here to be a hero today, nor to stand in front of you to gain your sympathy. I am not here to tell you that kidney stones hurt worse than childbirth. Only women who have had both experiences are allowed to say that, and I wouldn’t dream of wading into that territory. Far be it from me.... I came here today because I want to take next Sunday off, post-surgery, and I cannot fathom three Sundays in a row not talking. Preachers preach, and when they have nowhere to say what they need to say, it’s like a blockage, albeit a less painful one [than having a kidney stone].

I have often said that a sermon for me is really nothing more than a brief snapshot of my own spiritual journey at any given time. I don’t have a huge thought-out curriculum of where I want to go. Just ask these poor men [Tripp and Scott] who try to follow me musically. “Any idea of themes?” they often ask. In another life, I might have had a spreadsheet tied to the church calendar with beautiful creative flow, and cute little sermon titles all mapped out for the entire year. I have colleagues who do that (and I can’t stand to be in a room with them). No, when I’m asked about themes, I can only take some time and look inward and ask myself, “What is Spirit trying to say?” And as you know, there are times in the last year that I have chucked a sermon as late as 7:30 a.m. on a Sunday in favor of listening to Spirit. You’ll be glad to know that I listened in a little earlier this week.

I started working my way through this Eugene Peterson version of Psalm 30 on Monday, between visits to the ER, when I had little else to do but think. I was struck by the phrases like “You got me out of that

mess” or “I yelled for help and you put me together” or “The nights of crying your eyes out give way to days of laughter.” And I’m thinking, “OK, God. Now is the time! Let’s roll out some laughter. Let’s get me out of this mess.” Instead, I’ve been allowed to remain in it. And this is not easy to say, but there is a deep, deep wisdom to the whole thing. A purification. A purging of some things that otherwise I’d never pay attention to.

You all know that I am a lover of silence, of meditation, and contemplative life. I love to get in a room with like-minded folks and take in periods of communal silence, and when no one else is around I do it on my own. You might say it’s an addiction, and until now I would have said that it is an addiction with absolutely no downside. I have begun to find out that this is not the case. My body, you see, has come to the place where it has had to say, “Come back to earth and be with me. Stop pretending that body and spirit can be separate things.” Western Christianity—at least since the second or third century—has embraced a rather Greek dualism that the spirit is different from and higher than flesh. And in that sweet little churchy way they took it a step further to say that spirit is good and flesh is bad. This idea is the root of our guilt and shame, and kept nuns and church ladies in business for centuries. But like so much of what we have grown to question over the years, we can surely ask “What if that just isn’t true?” What if spirit and body are just aspects of one single thing? What if the body is holy and good, and what if it’s just a dwelling place or a temple where spirit lives? And so my body has chosen to say, “Hey, why don’t you hang out here once in a while. I feel neglected.” My only answer to that is, “You don’t really gotta yell so loud, you know.”

As many of you know, almost two months ago we began a new program called Yoga CCC. As leaders of this congregation, we thought of it as a really nice outreach, a good way to provide a community program, a way to attract a slightly younger demographic who might not come through these doors for other reasons. And it’s all that; but it’s more. I find myself here on Wednesday nights, on the floor in this room where we sing and speak and pray every week, and I close my eyes and feel the ground just pulling me close, as in a maternal hug. It is a deeply spiritual experience that Christopher leads us in each week. I am transported to other places, but none of those places is more important or more transcendent than the residence of my body, the grounding, the root, the foundation of every bit of my spiritual journey. Sometimes the body just wants a place at the table. Sometimes it waits patiently, and sometimes it just has enough and says “I want to be remembered. I want to be heard.”

Some weeks ago, Al Braidwood handed me Richard Rohr’s latest book, entitled *The Universal Christ*. In it Rohr says

Without a sense of the inherent sacredness of the world—of every tiny bit of life and death—we struggle to see God in our own reality, let alone to respect reality, protect it, or love it. The consequences of this ignorance are all around us, seen in the way we have exploited and damaged our fellow human beings, the dear animals, the web of growing things, the land, the waters, and the very air [and I might add our very bodies]. An incarnational worldview is the only way we can reconcile our inner worlds with the outer one, unity with diversity, physical with spiritual, individual with corporate, and divine with human.

There are some of you in this room who are facing far more difficult challenges than I, whose bodies may be reaching out for recognition. There's no simple way to talk about it. We constantly invite healing energy on Sundays and especially on Mondays, and we will continue that healing work for as long as it takes, and I'm guessing that's a lifetime.

I would love for Community Congregational Church to become known as the "yoga church," which is not to say that everyone has to do yoga. I'm just saying what if we were known as the place where body is honored in the same way that Spirit is, and what if we became a haven for non-duality, a place where we put our confidence in "original blessing" and shun the madness of "original sin."

What if we start seeing the divine light in our very selves, the energy of creation in the cells of our bodies? What if we just make the dwelling place of our soul a place of joy and habitation? What if we put our ears to the ground and listen for the heartbeat of the earth and say how good it is to be home?

