

Sermon – Sunday, January 8, 2023

Deacon Martha

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; The voice of the Lord splits the flames; The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe. The Lord shall give strength to his people; the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

The bulletin announced a mission trip to Mississippi. (Thank you, St. Paul's!) Rarely in my life was anything so sure. Immediately I knew that God was speaking to me, had chosen me. Still in my pew, my mind was already enroute. And the voice within, a pulse, a heartbeat to encourage me. Thankfully, no one in the congregation reported my lengthy, lone stay in the pew or subsequent discussion I had with the Trinity, working out the details...though trusting that it wasn't up to me...

I didn't want to wash my face. It would seem like scrubbing off the kiss of Christ. The aromatic scent of Chrism, the Epiphany of myrrh did linger, a sacrament, a sign that said, It Is Time. "Baptized", sent with blessing and strength and courage, to do the will of my Creator.

A few days later, in the damp, dark, predawn, months of anticipation, work, and planning are packed into a van and a car, loaded for Long Beach, MS, where we would lodge at Camp Coast Care, and work at rebuilding homes and lives destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Though some conversation with other volunteers who'd gone before us gave clues, none could have a knowledge of what this God given opportunity would mean to each of us as an individual.

I invite you to recall when, if ever, you've had an intimate encounter where a voice so lovingly gave you instruction and affirmation. Did you hear a voice that was commanding? Our psalm today uses some powerful language that may cause one to feel a bit intimidated. Maybe one might find strength within the words and not merely interpret them as harsh and demanding? My encounters reveal a relationship in which I've come to understand that our Creator has no desire to destroy, only to replenish and continue to build up...to empower his Creations, all of them, human and otherwise, intricately woven together in majestic and awesome fashion, to peacefully, respectfully, lovingly steward the Kingdom, paving the way, continuously bringing Heavenly qualities to Earthly presence.

The day's reading from Isaiah gives repeated voice to establishing justice. And done so in a peaceful and non-violent manner. We read that he will bring forth justice to the nations. Perhaps a bit later today or during the week you may want to take a moment to read the few lines in Isaiah that relate to justice-there are a few of them...I interpret the words to give an example of a servant who will use love, gentleness, not force, to bring about this most to be desired enterprise.

Today, celebrating the Day of the Baptism of Jesus, and also just after the glorious, light-filled day of The Epiphany, individually and in community, we renew our Baptismal Covenant.

Does the idea of a Prophet or speaking prophetically unnerve or alarm you? Maybe cause discomfort and panic thinking that you'll need to change your diet to include locusts and wild

honey while garbed in a hairy, itchy garment? But, what if...what if...instead, when we recite in our own voice, joining with others in community, we contemplate, gain insight and wisdom, truly believe that this is what it's all about?

While I agree there are varying degrees of prophesying and proclaiming, it doesn't seem far-fetched that God calls each of us to use our voices for advocating in unity with the marginalized and forgotten, for righteous resolutions and solutions, at the grassroots level, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, as Peter says in today's second reading, and that it is our call as followers of Jesus, members of the Beloved Community ever evolving and meant to be all-inclusive, to be very mindful of the Covenant we make, and to practice in thought, word, and deed those promises.

Dr. Barbara Holmes in a recent meditation from Fr. Richard Rohr writes this:

"This is a neglected but important aspect of the prophetic call. In Numbers 11:24-29, Moses is exhausted with the people. Basically, God says, 'Okay, okay, assemble the elders. Look to the community. You were never supposed to do this alone. I told you to do it; I didn't tell you to do it alone.' How many of us are carrying burdens that are not ours and we're feeling pretty righteous about it? The work of living and dying and raising children, and leading congregations was never meant to be solitary work. So after the elders assemble, Joshua tells Moses that the elders are prophesying, and he says, "Moses, Moses, make this stop!" And Moses' reply in Numbers 11:29 is "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that God would put God's Spirit on them!" "Let's just sit with this for a minute. Have you ever felt as if God's Spirit was on you? Although many of the prophets in the Bible are presented as single carriers of God's word, often there was a community of other prophets that they came from or were associated with. And so, who is your community?...If you're called to the prophetic task, and I think in some aspects all of us are-where is your prophetic community that will feed you and support you and guide you and help you?"

Yes, sometimes, I suspect many times, the idea of putting into action our voiced answer as renewed in our Baptismal Covenant, "I will with God's help", feels as uncomfortable as a garment made from camel's hair, as alienating as the lives of the Hebrew Prophets, and that the "taste" of proclaiming and preaching justice, dignity, respect for ALL, is as distasteful as a mouthful of locusts.

Prophet, mystic, theologian Howard Thurman asks, "Do you believe that life is really dynamic? That it isn't quite finished yet? That not only are you involved always in a circling series of potentials, but that you are potential. You, potential. And no time band, no time interval is able quite to contain you and the dynamics of your life and your situation. Do you believe that?"

Amen.