Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 August 29, 2021 ~ Season of Creation

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, O God. Amen

A prayer poem by e. e. cummings came to my attention the other day, and here it is, in their words:

I thank You God for most this amazing day:

for the leaping greenly spirits of trees

and a blue true dream of sky

and for everything

which is natural

which is infinite

which is yes

I who have died am alive again today  
And this is the sun's birthday  
This is the birth day of life and of love and wings  
And of the gay great happening illimitably earth

How should tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, breathing any  
Lifted from the no of all nothing  
Human merely being doubt unimaginable You?

Now the ears of my ears awake  
And now the eyes of my eyes are opened

I love this poem, do you?

The day, the trees and sky and all that is natural, infinite - all of this seems to point to a resounding yes, does it not? The sky and the blue of the sky, the trees and the green of them, the natural way of creation, that we

no matter how powerful we may like to think we are - we cannot on our own, create a tree out of nothing, nor can we make the sky to be blue, but on canvas.

There is a point in life for each of us I think, when the incredible, beyond-words beauty of this natural world wakes us up, astounds us, and we are never quite the same. I’ve heard the quote, ‘You never really realize how beautiful the world is, until you are about to die.’ I believe the author of those words was referring to something Jesus was prone to talking about, that dying to self - living for God and for neighbour. And in the poet’s way, ‘I who have died am alive again today,” - words of resurrection.

All of this is easily relates to the theme this Sunday, as we enter the Season of Creation. This Season starts on Sept. 1, but I couldn’t wait. Especially this year, with the newness of re-opening, and the dire awareness of just how bad the climate crisis truly is. We can acknowledge this in our worship. And we can do so much more, and we can do so much less, of that which we should not be doing. Everything that harms this natural world we inhabit. This world that is of God’s creation, that is of God.

In the Gospel, we hear that Jesus has a very strong message for the Pharisees and some of the scribes, as he responds to their questioning of the habits of some of Jesus’ disciples. They don’t wash their hands before they eat. It’s kind of hard to ignore the meaning of this for us today during this pandemic, when handwashing has been such a large part of each of our lives since last March. Handwashing that we believe could literally save our lives. I don’t know how much peril the disciples who didn’t wash their hands may have faced, from the germs of the day, but I don’t think the Pharisees and scribes were particularly concerned with that. It was more of the ritual, it seems. The disciples were not following the tradition of the elders, that was the main issue.

Now I recall a teaching from Cultural Anthropology, that so many peoples’ rituals and rules, were and are, adaptive. This is to say that for example, not eating pork, in Middle Eastern countries, while taught and passed down to generations of people as a religious law or rule, was actually exceptionally adaptive. There are certain reasons, scientific reasons, why raising and eating pork in that ecosystem, is not a good idea.

Another example: as you may have read in the Old Testament, God gave Noah beer. I think that was adaptive, God only knows the challenges Noah faced in getting two of every creature into the ark!

And I would apply this idea of adaptiveness, to the cleansing of pots and cups and kettles, and hands - it would be quite adaptive, to clean everything having to do with the consumption of food. We do it because we know the science, today, not as purity ritual - but it certainly is adaptive. So, is it really a big deal, why was Jesus so reactive, verbally, to their question.

The quote Jesus says from Isaiah gives the answer: in calling the Pharisees ‘hypocrites,’ he’s calling them out on their worship of God when they ‘teach human precepts, human ritual, as doctrine.” God did not ask them to condemn anyone for not washing according to protocol, the protocols are theirs, not God’s. The tradition is human. The commandment of God, perhaps that one about loving one’s neighbour as oneself, is forgotten or ignored. Jesus upholds the kindom of God, not of human tradition.

And then Jesus teaches that real defilement comes not from without, not from not washing but from what is within an individual - from the human heart. I know my thoughts, the good ones and the bad, the ones I should entertain and carry through on, and the ones I should not give attention to, the ones that need to go, or are in need of healing, even. I try to always take those thoughts, to God - to lay at the feet of the Creator, shall I say. And I ask for mercy, for God’s forgiveness. For God’s help.

For us today, I invite you to think about this gospel, as we might apply it to our behaviour towards and in, Creation. How do we think about our behaviour, in light of Jesus’ message today. Do I go on and on about the beauty of Creation, and then drive around and spew gas and toxic chemicals all over. Do I drive when I could have walked to the store. Do I use toxic chemicals on my lawn?

We’ve gone way past what might have been adaptive at one point - in our consumption, in our use of planes and automobiles, chemicals, and in overall consuming far more than is needed. At least I know I have at times, and I am sorry. I truly want to turn back to a simpler, less consumptive life. I will be making donations to the upcoming St. Aidan’s lawn sale.

But overall, I ask myself, how much am I truly willing to change, to try and turn the climate crisis around. Do I need the government to impose regulations, so that it’s no longer choice I have, because I can’t volunteer to reduce my own consumption? Have I lost sight and sense somewhere between my long-now awakening of the beauty of creation, and my personal responsibility for how I may or may not be a good steward of Creation.

So I ask that we consider, together, how we as the Parish of St. Aidan’s, might be able to make a difference. As seen on Facebook, we don’t need someone to do it all, we need everyone to do something. Together, we can do as we are called - bring our hearts closer to God, and honour Creation with new ways of living. We can stop the defiling of nature, and work together for the renewal that God is about in this beautiful -beyond -words planet Earth.

In the words of e. e. cummings once again, let us give thanks to God

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