

Easter Vigil C 2016

To recap: God saw everything that was created and indeed it was very good. “You shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors,” said God directly to Moses (or the land you are able to take from somebody else). Thus, even salvation history is written by those in power. “Once you get comfy, you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” So Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” (This scenario is not all that glorious if you’re an Egyptian charioteer, or spouse and family waiting for those charioteers to return from the big mud run, which they won’t). Nevertheless, the chosen survivors of this deluge report God as having said, “Do what I say, and the result will be your freedom to live well from now on and make good life choices.” Clearly, unless we accept these stories – our salvation history they’re called – as analogy, as metaphor, then we are stuck with a very partisan God. The victors have written the history. In Egyptian chronicles, this story, if recorded, is a disaster. But in our Bible, it is a triumph!

That’s Part I. But tonight, and throughout our lives, Part II changes this formula, 180 degrees. Part II goes something like this: If you want to live, you have to die to such partisanship. The measure of your death will be your renunciation of and resistance to triumph, displacement of others and unique chosenness. You will experience death to self as a growing desire to be just, peaceful, and respectful of others’ dignity, and a willingness to talk about

these things regularly and with anyone. In some ways, Part II is a heightened version of Part I, which says: "Do what God wants, and you will be well." Part II says: "Do what God wants, even though it may kill you to do it; and all will be well. Furthermore, I'll even show you what such a death looks like in the extreme, so that you won't have to take it that far. Don't be afraid; go and tell my friends to go to on home to Galilee and try it themselves. There they will see me again, and all will be well."

Shall we, will we take this larger view in order better to receive whatever it is the Bible has to tell us? Billie Holiday sang "Them that's got shall have; them that's not shall lose. So the Bible says, and it still is news." That assessment doesn't jibe with the book we've been reading. Those Egyptians had, but they lost, big time. In the Bible, money and worldly power don't seem to mean much in the long run, and if there's any one field the Bible addresses, it's the long run. The news we just read is the opposite: Them that have not will be the lucky ones; God will see to it... eventually. But Billie Holiday's words are all too persistently true in a society and culture that cannot bring itself to live according to God's professed word.

Some larger view might abandon the effort to understand God in terms of human economy. We would, perhaps replace our perception of a supreme being who seems randomly to select specific groups of humans for greatness, with instead a conception: If God were God, would God consist of Justice, Peace, Creativity, Respect, Fearlessness, and the Will to Resist Evil? These are not common human traits, they are cosmic forces to which human beings like ourselves can choose to ally ourselves or

not. They are the original descriptors of Creation. They are very good.

Might it not be helpful to note that the truly chosen people are the ones who, in seeking alliance with these forces, come to realize that our chosenness is a personal and inner phenomenon, it consists in our yearning for God. When we hear, "Many are called, but few are chosen," our human economist's brain tells us it's a contest of some kind; maybe it's even rigged. At the very least, there will be winners and losers. In terms of worldly health and wealth, power and peace that may be true – these are all today dismaying in the unevenness of their distribution -- the child that's got his own didn't necessarily get it on his own. But we can't believe it is God who has blessed him and cursed the poor.

Instead we know we are blessed when we experience the kind of dying that Jesus showed us, the kind that makes us more alive than ever. We know we are blessed when our energies turn from primarily managing time-bound human worldly economics on our own behalf, to the joyful and timeless pursuit of the cosmically pure forces of our baptismal covenant on behalf of others. This is resurrection – turning the gaze of love and the hand of nurture from self to other. This is the blessing anyone can have. It comes suddenly or gradually; it lasts forever and forevermore. By this measure, all are chosen, all are called by God to care for one another. This is the wondrous love we celebrate as Easter.