

Too Many Mornings -- Easter 3C

“Too many mornings, waking and pretending to be with you, wishing that the room might be filled with you. Morning to morning, turning into days. All that time wasted, merely passing through; time I could have spent being so content, wasting time with you.” The great American songwriter Stephen Sondheim (*A Little Night Music*, *Into the Woods*, etc., lyrics for *Gypsy* and *West Side Story*) wrote *Too Many Mornings* for a pair of lovers to sing in the musical *Follies*, but like all great music, the song has a natural and fundamental connection to our most deeply emotional and spiritual selves. If you wonder what I’m talking about, consider how close the Gospel tradition is to Soul music or Rhythm and Blues, or how easily Beethoven’s symphonies moved from sacred art to secular propaganda, employed by would-be triumphalists everywhere. We see how closely connected art and faith and instinct can be.

Sondheim’s lyric muses about mornings and ages spent pretending and wishing, merely passing through life, when there was greater depth and richness to be experienced. He jokes that it was “time I could have spent being so content, wasting time with you,” but the implication is clear: ‘with you is where I belong, where I shall always belong.’ Saul on the road to Damascus has the same kind of revelation as Jesus fills his heart with new purpose: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus! Now get up and let me tell you what you are to do. Get with the Way! Get on the street called Straight!

As Christians, we are continually receiving course

corrections, reminders and warning signs that let us know we're venturing down a crooked path. And we are also continually offered evidence of the truer joys and the challenging opportunities to which God is beckoning us.

This has been an extraordinary week for wake-up calls, if not wholesale and blinding conversions. Our Archbishop of Canterbury is in the news. The titular leader of the Anglican Communion, to which we, as Episcopalians belong – sort-of -- discovered that his parents weren't exactly who he thought they were. Apparently his biological parents had one too many mornings waking and pretending not to be with whomever they were with. They were both working on Winston Churchill's staff, where it seems all kinds of relational shenanigans went on. Archbishop Welby has been most gracious and peaceful about the news, pointing out that his upbringing with the Welby's was "a bit messy from time to time" (his understatement), but "There is no existential crisis, and no resentment against anyone. My identity is founded in who I am in Christ."

Meanwhile, another whole waking up experience is unfolding amongst Roman Catholics. Pope Francis on Friday, in a broad proclamation on family life, called for the Roman Church to be more welcoming and less judgmental, seeming to signal that divorced and remarried Catholics ought to receive Holy Communion, which they officially couldn't on Thursday. The 256-page Apostolic Exhortation is entitled *Amoris Laetitia*, Latin for "Joy of Love," so it may or may not make it past parental controls. Francis also calls for priests to welcome into the Church single parents, gay people and unmarried couples who are living together. He

writes: “A pastor cannot feel it is enough to simply apply moral laws to those living in irregular situations, as if those laws were stones to throw at people’s lives.” He did not go so far as to say, “Get with the Gay; get off the street called Straight,” but his remarks are revolutionary for a Pope. They can mean the opening up of history, with a new set of eyes on a new morning for the many Catholics who don’t believe these truths already.

Sondheim’s “...time I could have spent being so content, wasting time with you...” extends to these new realities. Whether we can be gracious enough to kid about our time being wasted no matter what we do with it or with whom we spend it, we must embrace and enfold the new things we learn into new ways of becoming Christians. We must normalize the Way, make familiar the street called Straight, and get on with the business of living well.

Last Sunday we heard once more the end – or at least it seemed like the end – of John’s magnificent, mystical and yes, very manipulative Gospel. We came to a place where it said “Now Jesus did many other things besides those written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that he is the Christ, the child of God, and thereby you may have life in Jesus’ name.” That sounds like a beautiful and perfect ending. So what is this extra installment for, this fish story? 153 fish indeed! Once John Wayne rides into the sunset, once JR gets shot, once Jesus convinces Thomas, what more is there to learn? This is where Sondheim comes in. This morning on the Sea of Galilee starts out as one of the too many they spend in frustration, reaching, straining, grieving and aching

unnecessarily. For the disciples, indeed for each and every one of us, life is a succession of days wherein we too often long for the grace we already possess. They can't be blamed for going back to fishing, after all, they were fisherpeople. But having lived in the presence of God's very self, a change had come over them; they had to be different.

Ever the gentle teacher, Jesus speaks some friendly advice, that ends up seeming like a miracle: he merely reminds them to try the other side of the boat. Now we left-handers take a little offense that we're known as the sinister ones, the gauche ones and, in this story it's implied that the left side of the boat was the wrong side of the boat, but the wisdom is in the story and we're not going to rewrite it this morning. Jesus reminds them that they are forgetting their new selves; they are forgetting to see things differently than they ever saw them before they knew faith. There is a whole new dimension to their being that has come about and will continue to exist and thrive despite Jesus being physically gone. Once we know and love this story, it becomes our story too – permanently.

Any self-respecting fisherman knows to try both sides of the boat, but somehow these fellows forget, and so God comes back and reminds them: they're too used to spending their mornings the old way. They now have the ability, thanks to their experience with Jesus, to look at life from both sides. We too must stay alive and awake and aware of the goodness and wonder of God's grace. We are all in the habit of treating each new day as a challenge we have to meet instead of as an opportunity to experience the loving power of the risen Christ. Of course we cannot

pretend or realistically hope that our best moments, our most fulfilled times of faith and love will ever just be continuous. But we must lose the habit of spending too many mornings pretending, warily, skeptically wishing, and determined not to be caught out, whatever our secrecy may cost.

Jesus is reminding the disciples, and us that every morning is an opportunity to open our eyes and say thank you for the wonder of faith, for the presence of hope, even when dark and difficult times arise, because it is still Easter; it is still Easter and it always will be, if only we orient ourselves to the East of it. We are still being cared for and loved. We will always have this 'nother side of the boat from which to fish. All our many mornings: mornings to mornings turning into days and years can be ones of contentedness and happy purpose if we carry this image with us: Jesus gently suggesting we try another way, gently reminding us time after time after time that our job is to feed one another.

This extra installment, tacked onto the end of John's Gospel is the Evangelist's way of bringing us back down to Earth, of letting us know the presence of Christ in our lives is a permanent possibility. John tells this epilogue to the Jesus story to remind us we must look for an angle or attitude in every situation that employs the new people we are, now that we know that death is not the final word. And the only way to do this is by the morning to morning acknowledgement to ourselves, to God, and to the others on our path, that we fully expect to meet Jesus today for breakfast on the beach.