

Showing Up -- Trinity Year C

“When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and stars that you arranged what are we that you should care for us, mere mortals that you should keep us in mind?”

We are gathered here this morning because we are curious about this question. We long to understand and live well into our relationship with the true God who was and is and is to come: When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and stars that you arranged what are we that you should care for us, mere mortals that you should keep us in mind? Yet you have made us little less than gods ourselves; you have crowned us with glory and honor, and you have given us dominion over all the earth and its creatures. Yes, even the savage beast.

When the psalmist exhorts us to respond to the wondrous inexplicability of our place in nature, we thrill at the clearness of our mission and our great privilege to be caretakers, dominant over of the rest of Creation. It is true, we can do this. We have the intelligence and industry to make the World both peaceful and healthy – which two are probably interdependent things -- This is where our worship is always directed, and this is where our hearts and energies get directed too, as much as we can. As people of faith, we rely on the happy industry of neighbor love, well-knowing that we can never do it perfectly.

But that very neighbor love, with all its fallings-short permutations and implications is the alchemy of salvation. God is telling us: “Just do do that voodoo that you do so well – if you will.” And we long to cooperate, even while forever, inevitably falling short. The world is so far from universal cooperation, and so far from peace, and so far from good health; even farther from consensus or commitment to how to improve, that the persistence of truth can become obscured or even dubious. But there are enough people who long to excercise neighbor love for the rest of us to believe that peace will ultimately prevail.

The wonder of Creation, observed, duly wondered at and noted, leads to our great pride, that we should be the most powerful beings in it. It leads to great arrogance, that we have rights of our own discerning that outstrip the rights of most every other created entity. Ultimately, if we are paying attention, and are compelled by the idea that our calling is to serve, rather than to be served, the wonder of Creation also leads to a sense of responsibility, a sense of obligation to use our gifts to do good work; to do God’s will if we can.

When Jesus tells us that more will be revealed, that we don’t need and can’t take all the information and knowledge that the future will hold for us, make no mistake: this is the nature and the measure of God’s purpose and the absolute foundation of our hope. We will never know everything, and God will always provide the wisdom we need and lack, but only if we ask for it.

Awhile back, I was in New York for my daughter Eve's college graduation. She did very well, I don't mind boasting; it was a gala day, as Groucho Marx used to say. At one point the choir sang a lovely setting of the old Celtic blessing: "May the road rise up to meet you..." At that point Eve leaned over to me and whispered, "Be careful what you pray for."

'May the road rise up to meet you' sounds sweet, but she was reminded of a summer camp adventure when she was 14. At this camp they take long bike trips through the beautiful rolling hills of New Hampshire and Vermont. But on one of her bike trips, she was speeding down a steep hill when she lost control of her bike and crashed.

This led to the phone call you never want to get. She looked...bad, with bruises, broken teeth, and lots of what they cutely call road rash. She was suffering, in the sense of great pain, not cooperation. But an amazing thing happened to her over the following week, as we coddled her, surrounded her with loving prayer, and changed her dressings. God spoke to her privately, in a way I don't think she could have understood before the crash, and filled her with the kind of character that Paul is talking about in the letter to the Romans: we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Within a week, she said she wanted to go back for the final days of camp. Well, you can imagine the awe and wonder on the faces of her campmates when I dropped her off – looking like a mummy – it was positively heroic! And you can imagine the relief and gratitude on the part of the camp staff too. Nothing is worse for morale and the endowment than having campers leave in ambulances. What excited her was the prospect of having a delightful, positive affect on her pals and her camp. All the better that it was exciting and fun for her to make the scene and show up for them.

Nowadays, only if you're looking for it can you see a tiny blue line on her lip where the road rose up to meet her. Scant physical evidence, but the character inside has only continued to grow.

In this outpost of God's holy church, St. Peter's by the Sea, we thirst for God; we are seekers. We help each other accept the suffering, in every sense of the word, that awaits us, because we know about the grace that will enable us to see past the suffering – the disappointments, losses, injuries, even death – to the hope that is ours for the enjoying together and the character that is ours for the growing together. We show up for each other, God willing.