

Second Weekend in Lent (C/RCL)
Luke 13:31-35; Psalm 27
March 16-17, 2019
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I heard recently about a contest inviting photographers to submit pictures of nature that suggest peace. People were then invited to vote for their favorite. Any thoughts about what image may have won? What scene from nature would **you** choose as a visual snapshot of peace?

A still ocean, flat as glass?

A doe nuzzling a sleeping fawn?

A summer meadow filled with wildflowers?

An eagle or hawk lazily riding the air currents high above the ground?

The surprising winner was a photo of a stormy, windswept, wave-tossed sea, pelted with rain, overshadowed by low clouds and dark heavens. **Why** did that kind of scary image evince peace?? Well, if you looked closely you could see cliffs on the shore, and in a tiny indentation in the rocks you could spy a mother bird, her wings spread out like a protective umbrella, her babies nestled and dry beneath. **Peace. Not the absence of storm. Safety in the midst of the storm.**

In Psalm 57:1 the psalmist, writer of holy songs, shares this:

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until the destroying storms pass by.*

There's just one experience I can remember of lots of little ones flocking to me for safety. As I look back, it reminds me of the scene in *The Nutcracker* when Mother Ginger appears with her huge hoopskirt, and a dozen little children, the "polichinelles," scurry out from under her skirts! The time was the summer of '76 and the place was San Juan Teotihuacan, Mexico. Between my freshman and sophomore year of college I was volunteering at the orphanage of Nuestros

Pequenos Hermanos, “Our Little Brothers and Sisters.” I was a little sad to be missing all the bicentennial action in the U.S., so was delighted to learn that the feast day of the patron saint of the little village of San Juan Teotihuacan was right around July 4th, and that fireworks were planned for the fiesta. It was a very different experience than fireworks over the mall in D.C., over the Charles River in Boston, or over New York Harbor, other magnificent displays I’ve witnessed closer to home. The pyrotechnics were beautiful and bright, but also a bit more fiery than I expected. I’m thinking they may not have been shot up high enough or there was some other unexpected glitch, because before we knew it chunks of burning fireworks and plenty of cinders were showering down on us. I was wearing a poncho because even in July the evenings in that high altitude valley near Mexico City get pretty cold. The children standing nearby ran to me and I instinctively raised my poncho so they could gather under it -- like chicks.

In today’s Gospel Jesus passionately, sadly laments,

How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Luke 13:34b)

Such a puzzlement! Why **not** fly toward the place of safety? Why **not** accept the maternal love and protection God offers? Jesus is addressing Jerusalem, “*the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.*” (Luke 13:34a) The religious leaders didn’t like His brand of servant leadership, didn’t appreciate His criticism of their less-than-faithful practices, didn’t want an outsider upending all their expectations of who the Messiah would be, how He would act, how He would relate to them.

But that’s them. ‘Doesn’t leave us off the hook. The question remains: what sometimes prevents **us** from flying toward the divine place of safety? Why don’t **we** always accept the maternal love and protection that our Lord offers? Maybe we’d rather be self-sufficient. Maybe we’re afraid that by accepting His protection we’re also accepting His Lordship. We’d be right, of

course. And it's certainly true that **the more** we accept His Lordship **the less** we're trimming our own sails, plotting our own course, serving our own interests. The closer we draw to our Lord the more freedom we give Him to shape our lives, reorder our priorities, take the reins of our lives.

There's hatred in this world that needs to be rooted out: for instance, the hatred that led a gunman to take 49 lives in a New Zealand mosque this past Friday, a hatred that leads to the bombing of mosques, temples, churches, anywhere around the world. But there's also hatred in our hearts that needs to be rooted out. Sometimes our lack of love, our distaste for others, is small and discrete, like a dandelion growing in an otherwise putting-green-like lawn so the Holy Spirit just needs the equivalent of a weed fork to uproot it. Sometimes our prejudice is more like the dreaded Star of Bethlehem, "noxious" invader, bane of our Churchyard Memorial Garden & Property Committees. Our devaluing of groups of people who differ from us is destructive to our relationships, a contradiction to our faith, a blight on our citizenship, and it calls for multiple doses of spiritual Round-Up. And sometimes our lack of love, our or apathy toward others is like a cancer that disfigures us and requires even more radical heavenly medicine. If we have any inkling of that, we may be like the frightened person in Francis Thompson's poem, "*The Hound of Heaven*," who flees the passionate, pursuing God "down the nights and days, down the labyrinthine ways..." God pursues us in love to claim us as His own, sometimes "protecting" by passing us through the fire, purifying us of what we need to leave behind in order to move ahead....

In this weekend's psalm, beautiful Psalm 27, we hear this expression of trust:

*For in the day of trouble God will give me shelter,
hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary,
and raise me high upon a rock. (Ps. 27:5)*

Along those lines: this St. Patrick's Day weekend I'll end with a prayer called both "The Breastplate of St. Patrick" and "The Deer's Cry." Legend has it that in the year 433 Patrick and a band of his

missionaries were headed to a high king's castle to share the Good News of the Gospel. A band of Druids had had more than enough of Patrick and his Christianity, and they planned to waylay and slaughter both Patrick and his followers. Patrick sensed the danger and prayed the following prayer in transit. He and his friends traveled safely that day, for instead of seeing Patrick and friends, the Druids saw only a doe and her fawns passing through the forest.

The Deer's Cry

I arise today

Through the strength of heaven;
Light of the sun, Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning, Swiftmess of the wind,
Depth of the sea, Stability of the earth,
Firmness of the rock.

I arise today

Through God's strength to pilot me;
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me, afar and near,
Alone or in a multitude.

Christ shield me today

Against wounding,
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today

Through the mighty strength
Of the Lord of creation.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham