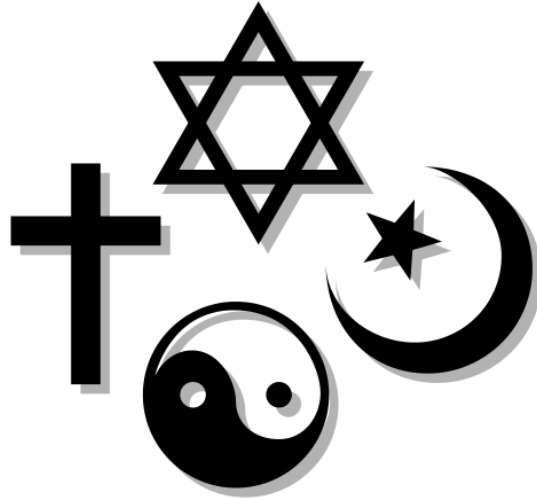




**Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, November 17th, 2019**

Unmasking the Ambiguity of Religious Language



Insecurity, especially collective insecurity of groups of people, is dangerous. The American political thinker, Francis Fukuyama, has observed that the greatest challenge before us as a global people, is to forge an understanding of human dignity, that is inclusive of us all, not just some. To the extent that we do not achieve this end, we will increasingly find ourselves torn between identities in a politics of resentment.

In times such as ours, religion may either help to forge a sense of our commonality as human beings, or irritate our differences even more by itself, engaging in a politics of identity, becoming simply another group with its self-interest at heart. Any reading of the Gospels surely speaks to us of the man Jesus of Nazareth who rejects this latter sort of understanding of religion and faith, for Jesus himself is well aware of the ambiguity of Judaism with which he has to grapple. To offer a tighter understanding of this: even as religious people, we are racked with ambiguity. As Luther put it, “*simul justus et peccator*”, both righteous (just) and sinner at eh same time.

OUR GATHERING

Announcements

Welcome

Invitation

In the name of God our Father and Mother
 In the name of the Son, Jesus
 In the name of the Spirit, God in us and among us.

The Lord be with you
And also with you

We are here
in the name of Jesus Christ;

To worship the God who gave us life
 and who sustains our every breath,
***and to praise the Spirit
 who enlivens our hearts and enlightens our minds.***

Come among us Jesus!
Come Jesus and meet us here!

Hymn: Immortal, invisible God only wise (TIS 143, Walter. C. Smith)

We Light the Candle

A Prayer about Lumps under the Carpet and Skeletons in the Cupboard: Things that Kill Us!

There are lumps under the carpet that the hoover won't help.
 There are skeletons in the cupboard that tap, tap on the doors.
 There are cats tied in bags that struggle to get out.

***We live dying O Lord.
 Covering up, evading and avoiding the truth
 from ourselves, about ourselves***

There are lumps under the carpet that the hoover won't help.
 There are skeletons in the cupboard that tap, tap on the doors.
 There are cats tied in bags that struggle to get out.

***We live dying O Lord.
 Covering up, evading and avoiding the truth,
 from others, especially those we love and who love us.***

There is nothing hidden, that won't ultimately come out.
 You already know.
 So let's get it over with God!

***Free me to be really open,
 Free of cover-ups and secrets
 Free to really live!
 Amen***

The Peace

SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some thoughts about being human and violent

“Collective fear stimulates herd instinct, and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd.”

Bertrand Russell, Unpopular Essays

“I am a violent man who has learned not to be violent and regrets his violence.”

John Lennon

“The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion [...] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.”

Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order

The human psyche has two great sicknesses: the urge to carry vendetta across generations, and the tendency to fasten group labels on people rather than see them as individuals. Abrahamic religion mixes explosively with (and gives strong sanction to) both. Only the wilfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today. Without a doubt, it is the prime aggravator of the Middle East. Those of us who have for years politely concealed our contempt for the dangerous collective delusion of religion need to stand up and speak out. Things are different now. ‘All is changed, changed utterly.’”

Richard Dawkins, A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love

Isaiah 65:17-25 (The Message)

Beth Facer

The writer of this section of Isaiah grounds the idea of heaven, the end time, in very earthy images, as he associates renewed reality with the return of the exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem. In other words, heaven on earth is connected with deliverance from captivity. Central to freedom is the image, not just of a new physical world, but most crucially, a world marked by the joy of renewed relationships and continuous connections. As modern people, it is this vision of the future that shapes the way we live now in the present. We are asked to live as people of hope in the here and now focused upon relationships which traverse the walls that we constantly build.

New Heavens and a New Earth

17-25 “Pay close attention now:

I’m creating new heavens and a new earth.
 All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain
 are things of the past, to be forgotten.
 Look ahead with joy.
 Anticipate what I’m creating:
 I’ll create Jerusalem as sheer joy,
 create my people as pure delight.
 I’ll take joy in Jerusalem,
 take delight in my people:
 No more sounds of weeping in the city,
 no cries of anguish;
 No more babies dying in the cradle,
 or old people who don’t enjoy a full lifetime;
 One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—
 anything less will seem like a cheat.
 They’ll build houses

and move in.
 They'll plant fields
 and eat what they grow.
 No more building a house
 that some outsider takes over,
 No more planting fields
 that some enemy confiscates,
 For my people will be as long-lived as trees,
 my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work.
 They won't work and have nothing come of it,
 they won't have children snatched out from under them.
 For they themselves are plantings blessed by GOD,
 with their children and grandchildren likewise GOD-blessed.
 Before they call out, I'll answer.
 Before they've finished speaking, I'll have heard.
 Wolf and lamb will graze the same meadow,
 lion and ox eat straw from the same trough,
 but snakes—they'll get a diet of dirt!
 Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill
 anywhere on my Holy Mountain," says GOD.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 98:5-9 (NRSV)

Beth Facer

If the psalms had been written by a single author, you might think he was bipolar. The highs are very high, and the lows are very low. Some psalms are full of bitterness and despair, complaining about God's silence. Why has he abandoned us? Why is faith so bitter? Other psalms are nearly manic in their joy. This week's Psalm 98 is a case in point. As the Bible so often does, Psalm 98 offers a counter-intuitive alternative to conventional wisdom: however low the cultural trends and opinion polls sink, do not yield to the spirit of despair. Instead, choose the most radical of all personal options today — the subversive act of genuine joy. Joy is an ambiguous word. We often link it with happiness, health, success, fame, wealth, pleasure, fun, or good fortune. In that sense of the word, joy is derivative, attached to and dependent upon some external source. Joy of that sort can exude a sense of smugness, entitlement, narcissism, or even self-pity in the absence of desired objects. Such joy seldom lasts long or is genuinely fulfilling, for it creates its own set of needs that are rarely satisfied. Joy, then, is more elusive, more subtle and more nuanced than happiness, pleasure or good fortune. The opposite of joy is not sadness but anxiety. Living joyfully because of God's lavish love is the greatest honour that we can give God, said the mystic Juliana of Norwich (14th century). No matter how bleak the forecasts of our cultural

commentators, with joy we can experience his love even in the dust and dirt of our lives.

⁴Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵***Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.***

⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

⁷***Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.***

⁸Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy

⁹***at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.***

Luke 21:5-19 (The Message)

Richard Facer

This Gospel reading seems much bleaker than the reading we have just heard from Isaiah; and it is. This is because it deals with the apocalyptic imagination of those who are in earshot of Jesus, as he gives some clue as to the likelihood of the destruction of Jerusalem – which occurred some years later at the hands of Rome. Those listening to Jesus' comment, automatically attribute such violence to God's hand in history. Jesus, wary of these sorts of faith views, attributes violence to human thought and practice, refusing to allow God to be drawn into the equation as a form of justification. He then prepares his followers to understand that as a minority, they should expect persecution, for that is what human beings do.

Watch Out for Doomsday Deceivers

⁵⁻⁶ One day people were standing around talking about the Temple, remarking how beautiful it was, the splendour of its stonework and memorial gifts. Jesus said, "All this you're admiring so much—the time is coming when every stone in that building will end up in a heap of rubble."

⁷ They asked him, "Teacher, when is this going to happen? What clue will we get that it's about to take place?"

8-9 He said, “Watch out for the doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, ‘I’m the One,’ or, ‘The end is near.’ Don’t fall for any of that. When you hear of wars and uprisings, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history and no sign of the end.”

10-11 He went on, “Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Huge earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. You’ll think at times that the very sky is falling.

12-15 “But before any of this happens, they’ll arrest you, hunt you down, and drag you to court and jail. It will go from bad to worse, dog-eat-dog, everyone at your throat because you carry my name. You’ll end up on the witness stand, called to testify. Make up your mind right now not to worry about it. I’ll give you the words and wisdom that will reduce all your accusers to stammers and stutters.

16-19 “You’ll even be turned in by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. Some of you will be killed. There’s no telling who will hate you because of me. Even so, every detail of your body and soul—even the hairs of your head!—is in my care; nothing of you will be lost. Staying with it—that’s what is required. Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry; you’ll be saved.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus (TIS 203, St Elizabeth, Anon)

A Film Clip from “the Life of Brian”.

The Life of Brian was a film that initially offended Christian sensitivities: seen as a secularist attack upon faith. There is some truth to that. Digging deeper however, there are some real insights about the way we humans organize ourselves, identify and scapegoat ‘enemies’ and maintain hope. In this scene, we see the latter: the way in which hope is maintained through the religious mystification of things: ordinary people like Brian are given a significance that he does not have and shoes are seen as signs of something greater. Jesus would have real sympathy for this debunking of religious language Enjoy! (50:30 – 58:10)

Some Thoughts.....

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Seng Eng Low

Closing Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting (TIS 665, Noel Nouvelet, John L. Bell)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

Life is about being created and being creative;
overcoming destructiveness in our own nature
and the communities in which we live;
being a source of oxygen for all.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Closing Song: May the feet (TIS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Musical Postlude

Organist::

Tony Ireland