



Third Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 15th, 2020

Becoming Truly Human and Christian The 'Now-ness' of the Gospel: Confronting the Absurd



An Image of Estragon and Vladimir looking at the moon as they wait for Godot to arrive. From the play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett, 1953

The Gospel reading last week referred to Nicodemus (John 3:1-17). This week we hear of the story of the Woman at the Well (John 4: 5-42), and next week we will hear of the Blind Man (John 9:1-41). To understand these readings, we need to read them not only in isolation, not only in their own right, but together. In a very real sense, each reading constitutes an advance, a progression, upon the other, when it comes to belief in Jesus, which after all, is why John writes the Gospel to begin with...so that his readers will be persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

As we saw last week, Jesus' call to conversion, "rebirth from above", is not as it is often construed, simply a process of changing brands from Judaism to Christianity, swapping one 'dogmatic' identity for another. The account about Nicodemus set out clearly what this change amounts to: to follow Jesus concerned the challenge for Nicodemus to surrender, to let-go of his securities, to abandon religious externals, and to allow Jesus to 'carry him'. The story of Nicodemus is about the invitation to inward and outward emancipation, to inner and outer freedom, moving from the centre of religious and institutional power, to the margins, running the risk of the disapproval of both colleagues and structures, from whom and from which Nicodemus the power-broker had historically benefitted. In short, conversion, "rebirth from above" is about seeing with two eyes, not just one eye, seeing God, the world and ourselves broadly and deeply, imaginatively and creatively, not from the seat of power, but from the edges of the powerless.

Today, as we turn to the "woman at the well", we turn to a woman who *was* powerless and who as such, meets Jesus. In comparison with Nicodemus, of whose ultimate response to Jesus, we remain unclear, as he struggles with 'one-eyed' sight – that of power – this nameless woman, shows more promise as she confronts the tragic absurdity of her life by waiting for a Messiah figure. And yet, critical reflection leads us to conclude that her waiting is passive, resigned. Let's explore her approach: her resigned 'hope' and Jesus' response.

GATHERING

Nothing Can Trouble 820

Nada te turbe

First system of musical notation for 'Nothing Can Trouble'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time. The melody is in the treble clef. The lyrics are: Noth-ing can trou - ble; noth-ing can fright - en. Those who seek Na - da te tur - be, na - da te gs - pan - te. Quien a Dios

Second system of musical notation for 'Nothing Can Trouble'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time. The melody is in the treble clef. The lyrics are: God shall nev - er go want - ing, God a - lone fills us, tie - ne na - da le fal - ta. So - lo Dios bas - ta.

This meditative refrain from Taizé is based on a saying attributed to Teresa of Avila: "Let nothing trouble you; let nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever possesses God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

TEXT: Attr. Teresa of Avila, 16th cent.; para. Taizé Community: Spanish, 1986; English, 1995
MUSIC: Jacques Berthier, 1986
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NADA TE TURBE
Irregular

(Also TiS 739, Teresa of Avila 1515-82, tr. the Taizé community, France)

Welcome

In the name of the Father

In the name of the Son

In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with

And also with you

We light the Paschal Candle

Let's Sing: Come Sing Praises to the Lord (TIS 53, Calypso Carol, Michael Perry)....from Psalm 95, today's psalm.

Waiting at the Well - Beyond Myopia

In this meditation, I draw on the idea of seeing. In effect, we see with our brain, for it is our brain that *interprets* the visuals cast upon the eye. The Woman at the Well *interprets* the unexpected meeting with Jesus as best she can through the light of her experience as a mere Samaritan, a half-breed, and through her experience as a woman who in all likelihood is the scapegoat of even her own Samaritan community, due to her various liaisons with various men. What moves her is Jesus' acceptance of her, and while understanding that, she still does not see far enough, she still does not really *get* his identity. In this poem/prayer, I also try to correlate this woman with our own experiences of desolation and gratitude

How often have I come here,
to this place of
old faith and fresh neediness,
bent down with the burden
of my failures, stumbling
in my thirsting for hopefulness,
the cracked vessel of my heart
leaking grief. . .

For whom, for what am I waiting?

How often have I come here,
not expecting you in the heat
of my pressures,
not expecting you in the stress
of my confusion,
yet meeting you
who offers water to me, in my helplessness,
who quenches the raw thirst
for acceptance,
who gives the deep sustenance
of kindness without payment,
the nourishment of love without limit...

For whom, for what am I waiting

How often have you met me,
refilling my heart, leaving me
astonished again in the depths of my being,
that you waited here,
for me, even me?

For me, even me

Peace

Lent Event

This week, we continue listening to the story of Ambon.

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about the Right and Wrong Sort of Waiting

It is when expectation replaces submission, when despair is touched by the awareness of possibility, that the forces of human desire and passion for social justice are unloosed

Robert Kennedy

Waiting is the great vocation of the dispossessed.

Mary Gordon

Find your eternity in each moment!

Henry David Thoreau

You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes. **A. A. Milne**

We spend our lives, all of us, waiting for the great day, the great battle, or the deed of power. But that external consummation is not given to many: nor is it necessary. So long as our being is tensed, directed with passion, towards that which is the spirit of all things, then that spirit will emerge from our own hidden, nameless effort.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ

Estragon: Let's go

Vladimir: We can't

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot

Estragon: Simply wait?

Vladimir: We're used to it

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

A Myth is an event that occurs independently of human will and action, regardless of what we do, but the news that the *kingdom arrives*, means that we must *make it arrive*.

José Porfirio Miranda, *El Ser y el Mesías (Being and the Messiah)*

Exodus 17:1-7 (The Message)

The book of Exodus is formative for the Hebrew people, grounded in their liberation from slavery and oppression under the Egyptian empire. This idea of liberation and freedom is exactly what the people in this reading are reacting against. The insight here is that while the exit from slavery has physically happened, the psychological and spiritual liberation still has not. These people, find the burden of freedom all too much and want to return to their earlier state, which now seems almost preferable as they nostalgically look back. In response to their absurd desire to return to un-freedom, and a state of unfaith in Yahweh, the God of liberation, Moses, strikes the rock, causing water to flow. This action is a metaphor: the people can trust Yahweh for their present and future in a barren and unpromising place

17 ¹⁻² Directed by GOD, the whole company of Israel moved on by stages from the Wilderness of Sin. They set camp at Rephidim. And there wasn't a drop of water for the people to drink. The people took Moses to task: "Give us water to drink." But Moses said, "Why pester me? Why are you testing GOD?"

³ But the people were thirsty for water there. They complained to Moses, "Why did you take us from Egypt and drag us out here with our children and animals to die of thirst?"

⁴ Moses cried out in prayer to GOD, "What can I do with these people? Any minute now they'll kill me!"

⁵⁻⁶ GOD said to Moses, "Go on out ahead of the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel. Take the staff you used to strike the Nile. And go. I'm going to be present before you there on the rock at Horeb. You are to strike the rock. Water will gush out of it and the people will drink."

⁶⁻⁷ Moses did what he said, with the elders of Israel right there watching. He named the place Massah (Testing-Place) and Meribah (Quarrelling) because of the quarrelling of the Israelites and because of their testing of GOD when they said, "Is GOD here with us, or not?"

The word of the Lord'

Thanks be to God

Psalm 95

Psalm 95 is an extravagant call to the community to give thanks and praise to Yahweh their God. The call, in fact, comes in three parts. In vv. 1-5 and 6-7a the call to the people is in a positive tone, inviting them to sing to Yahweh, make a joyful noise and to worship and bow down to him. In the first two calls a reason for praise and worship follows each summons. This is typical of biblical psalms of praise. In vv. 1-5 the reason (vv. 3-5) is that Yahweh is creator.

In vv. 7b-11 the tone changes to one of plea and warning. The reason given for the second call to praise is much shorter than the first but no less powerful in its claim upon the people (v. 7a). Yahweh is ‘our God’ and we are ‘the people of his pasture’, ‘the sheep of his hand’. It reminds the people to whom the call to praise is addressed that they are part of the community who are Yahweh’s people, claimed by him. Such a relationship was historically formed in the exodus. While the first reason for praise involves the mythic dimension of Yahweh as creator, the second draws on the people’s experience of Yahweh in their own lives, or the lives of their people. The third part of the psalm, vv. 7b-11 strikes quite a different note, and yet in its own way still calls the people to reverence. Verse 7b reads as a continuation of the previous invitations, spoken by a leader who now expresses some despair over the people’s seeming reluctance to heed the call to praise Yahweh. In this section the actual call to praise is implicit while the reason for praise, expressed negatively, is explicit.

¹O come, let us sing to the LORD; ***let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!***

²Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; ***let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!***

³For the LORD is a great God, ***and a great King above all gods.***

⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth; ***the heights of the mountains are his also.***

⁵The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, ***which his hands have formed.***

⁶O come, let us worship and bow down, ***let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!***

⁷For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. ***O that today you would listen to his voice!***

⁸Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, ***as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,***

⁹when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, ***though they had seen my work.***

¹⁰For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ***“They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.”***

¹¹Therefore in my anger I swore, ***“They shall not enter my rest.***

John 4:4-52 (Good News Translation)

This is a long reading, but an interesting and engaging one. Recent expositions have argued

that John wants us to see this woman only in a good light, nevertheless, it is hard to read the reference to husbands (who may all have died) and to her unmarried partner without at least catching some whiff of cultural disapproval, which some have suggested explains why she came to fetch water not in the cool of the day when most would come. She seems to have had three things counting against her: being a Samaritan, a woman and a 'sinner'. Any one of those counts would be enough for some to shun her. Jesus does not. But John wants to give us more. While affirming and preserving the message of hospitality implied in Jesus' actions, John also wants us to celebrate Jesus as the giver of the water of life, the new holy space, which transcends all prior faith claims and aspirations

⁴ on his way there he had to go through Samaria.

⁵ In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the trip, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." (⁸ His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

⁹ The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan—so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)^[a]

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? ¹² It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his children and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life."

¹⁵ "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ "Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back."

¹⁷ "I don't have a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. ¹⁸ You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

¹⁹ “I see you are a prophet, sir,” the woman said. ²⁰ “My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. ²³ But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is.”

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “I am he, I who am talking with you.”

²⁷ At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, “What do you want?” or asked him, “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, ²⁹ “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?” ³⁰ So they left the town and went to Jesus.

³¹ In the meantime the disciples were begging Jesus, “Teacher, have something to eat!”

³² But he answered, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³ So the disciples started asking among themselves, “Could somebody have brought him food?”

³⁴ “My food,” Jesus said to them, “is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do. ³⁵ You have a saying, ‘Four more months and then the harvest.’ But I tell you, take a good look at the fields; the crops are now ripe and ready to be harvested! ³⁶ The one who reaps the harvest is being paid and gathers the crops for eternal life; so the one who plants and the one who reaps will be glad together. ³⁷ For the saying is true, ‘Someone plants, someone else reaps.’ ³⁸ I have sent you to reap a harvest in a field where you did not work; others worked there, and you profit from their work.”

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰ So when

the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there two days.

⁴¹ Many more believed because of his message, ⁴² and they told the woman, “We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world.”

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: The Sorrowing Song – Lord hear my praying (TiS 689, Lara, Robin Mann)

Some thoughts...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odHqG1rA4M8>

Let's Give

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

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, “Lord, confront the absurd”! and we respond, “Give us the courage to join you”!

Song: Guide me O thou great redeemer (TiS 569, Cwm Rhondda, William Williams)

Blessing

May we see with new eyes, confronting the absurd, living the moment.
May we discern the spirits
May we read the signs of the times
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ
Amen

Musical Meditation – Alleluia (TiS 702, Taizé, Alleluia 7, Jacques Berthier)

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE01AXL72yI>

Closing Postlude