

Sermon, Epiphany 7C, 2022 (2/20/2022)

Sylvia Miller-Mutia, Associate Rector

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

Readings at [https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC RCL/Epiphany/CEpi7 RCL.html](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC/RCL/Epiphany/CEpi7_RCL.html)

Intro

In the Psalm appointed for today, the Psalmist writes:

1 Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; *

do not be jealous of those who do wrong.

7 Be still before the Lord *

and wait patiently for him.

8 Do not fret yourself over the one who prospers, *

the one who succeeds in evil schemes.

9 Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; *

do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil. (PSALM 37)

Personal Reflection

It's hard not to take this Psalm a little personally. "Do not fret!" 3 X. I am a big one for fretting.

Check in during Bible Study last Thursday I admitted my low is I'm ALWAYS anxious...the circumstances I attach that anxiety to just vary from week to week.

Last week I was fretting over the Flurry of hostile emails from FOX news viewers who did not share my enthusiasm for the new proposed social studies in NM. The week before I was fretting about some minor disagreements among members of a committee I chair. The week before THAT I was fretting about a family conflict.

I wonder what causes YOU to fret? And I wonder what you do with that fretting?

DRG Lenten Vocations Course

How do our baptismal vows offer a "roadmap" for our faithful response when we don't know which way to turn?

How do my priestly vows offer a "roadmap" for my faithful response in situations of anxiety and conflict?

Name in Baptism. Nourish in the Eucharist. Teach. Heal. **Forgive. Bless.**

I intentionally practiced holding these vows close to my heart this week, as I found myself fretting as I prepared for a visit with an old friend. It had been several years since I heard from

this person, and our last interactions had been fraught with hurt and misunderstanding. So, when he called out of the blue to see if I would meet him for coffee, I immediately began to fret. But in the midst of my fretting, I held my vows close. As I arrived for our meeting, I held my vocation close. Remember who you are. Remember your calling. Name. Nourish. Teach. Heal. Forgive. Bless. Forgive. Bless. Forgive. Bless.

It turned out to be a beautiful, unexpected, reconciling conversation. Miraculous, really. There was healing. And forgiveness. And blessing. And release. The seeds were sown for Resurrection.

Later that day I mentioned my conversation, in passing, to a mutual friend, who looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "Good thing he came to you." She said, half-jokingly. "I wouldn't have forgiven him. But I guess you sort of **had** to forgive him since you're a priest, and that's kind of your job."

Enter Jesus in today's Gospel...

Gospel

*Jesus says, "I say to **[all]** you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **bless those who curse you**, pray for those who abuse you...Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. **Forgive, and you will be forgiven**; give, and it will be given to you...*

Shoot.

Turns out that the hard and holy work of Forgiveness and Blessing is **not** only for priests.

Turns out that, according to Jesus, this is the calling of ALL who would follow him on the Way that leads to Life.

Loving and blessing, forgiving and giving, showing mercy and refraining from judgment...even, especially when it comes to our enemies...this work, Jesus says, belongs to all of us.

Examples (Don't tell me, SHOW me!)

Okay. Fine. Whatever. Easy for you to say, Jesus.

That all sounds well and good in theory.

But I'd like to see someone actually DO IT.

Don't just tell me.

If you really mean it, (as many a pop song repeatedly states) you gotta **show me!**

Fair enough. Christianity is not fundamentally a religion based on IDEAS. Christianity is fundamentally a religion based on A PERSON. Our Spirituality, as Christians, is deeply

dependent on INCARNATION. Real Human Life. Real Flesh and Blood. As it says in John's Gospel, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Enter Joseph in today's first lesson from the book of Genesis.

Bible (Genesis)

Joseph (Recap Story of Joseph)

Maybe you struggle to relate to Joseph because, you know, he lived SO LONG ago. So, let's turn for a minute to another "flesh and blood" example, of more recent history and less mythic proportions.

A few weeks ago, our "Holy Troublemakers" class learned about a man named Bayard Rustin.

Holy Troublemakers

Bayard Rustin (Recap Story of Bayard Rustin)

Bayard Rustin, was an African American leader in social movements for civil rights, gay rights, labor rights, and nonviolence beginning in the 1940s until his death in the 1980's..

If you don't immediately recognize his name, don't feel bad—you aren't alone. While he was an influential advisor to many of the greatest leaders of the civil rights movement, his work was regularly pushed into the background and "behind the scenes", because, in addition to being African American, Rustin was also a gay man.

He was born in 1912 in Pennsylvania, and raised by his Quaker grandparents.

As an adult, Rustin was a pacifist, utterly committed to nonviolence. He served time in federal prison for refusing to serve as a soldier in World War II. He served time doing hard labor on a chain gang for his efforts to desegregate busses in North Carolina. He convinced Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to adopt non-violence as a guiding principle in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. He endured the homophobic slights of other Civil Rights leaders, and organized King's March on Washington with only 8 weeks of planning. He toiled in support of human rights not only in this country, but also in India, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa until his death in 1987.

Rustin would later claim, "My activism did not spring from my being gay, or for that matter from my being Black... Rather it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing and the values that were instilled in me by my grandparents who raised me." The example of Jesus, and the example of his grandparents, enabled Rustin to both endure AND non-violently resist injustice in every aspect of his life.

And then, of course, if we need another example, there's always the "flesh and blood" example of Jesus, himself.

Jesus

Jesus doesn't only tell us. Jesus himself shows us what it looks like to live, and die, according to his teachings. Jesus shows us what it looks like to love, and bless, and forgive.

Jesus, sits at table and shares bread with his friends, knowing that one of them is about to betray him.

Jesus, hangs from the cross in agony, and uses his dying breath to utter this prayer:

"Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do"

Conclusion

Beloved of God, Hear God's invitation to me, and to you:

Whenever we find yourself embroiled in anger, or anxiety or injustice, or conflict.

Whenever we're seething or stuck and we don't know what's next:

HEED THE WISDOM OF THE PSALMIST:

DO NOT FRET

DO NOT BE JEALOUS

BE STILL

WAIT PATIENTLY

DO NOT FRET

REFRAIN FROM ANGER

LEAVE RAGE ALONG

DO NOT FRET

HEED THE WISDOM OF JESUS:

LOVE.

DO GOOD.

BLESS.

PRAY.

BE MERCIFUL.

DO NOT JUDGE.

DO NOT CONDEMN.

FORGIVE.

GIVE.

TAKE A GOOD, DEEP BREATH

AND YOUR NEXT BEST STEP

IN IMITATION OF JOSEPH

TAKE A GOOD, DEEP BREATH
AND YOUR NEXT BEST STEP
IN IMITATION OF BAYARD RUSKIN

TAKE A GOOD, DEEP BREATH
AND YOUR NEXT BEST STEP
IN IMITATION OF JESUS

TAKE A GOOD, DEEP BREATH
AND YOUR NEXT BEST STEP
**TOWARDS PEACE
TOWARDS RECONCILIATION
TOWARDS ABUNDANCE OF LIFE
AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

AMEN.