

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

Sunday, July 14, 2024

Gathering Music: Todd Silvius

Welcome: Stefanie Bauman

Psalm 66 vv 1-4 (read in unison)

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
Sing the glory of his name;
Give to him glorious praise.
Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
All the earth worships you;
They sing praises to you,
Sing praises to your name."

1. Hymn: *Canticle of the Turning*

My soul cries out with a joyful shout that
the God of my heart is great,
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight
and my weakness you did not spurn. So

from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?

Refrain:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let
the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all
tears for the dawn draws near and the
world is about to turn.

2. Hymn: *This is My Father's World* (Green bk 554)

This is my father's world.
And to my listening ears all nature sings
and round me rings
The music of the spheres.

This is my father's world; I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my father's world.
 The birds their carols raise.
 The morning light, the lily white,
 Declare their maker's praise.

This is my father's world.
 He shines in all that's fair.
 In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
 He speaks to me everywhere.

In the middle ages of your life, not too old, no longer young,
 I'll be there to guide you through the night, complete what I've begun.
 When the evening gently closes in and you shut your weary eyes,
 I'll be there as I have always been with just one more surprise.

Reading: Matthew 25: 34b – 36 -- Stefanie Bauman

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

3. Hymn: *Let Justice Flow Like Streams (Blue Bk #763)*

Let justice flow like streams of sparkling water, pure, enabling growth, refreshing life, abundant, cleansing, sure.

Let righteousness roll on as others' cares we heed, an ever-flowing stream of faith translated into deed.

So may God's plumb line, straight, define our measure true, and justice, right, and peace pervade this world our whole life through.

4. Hymn: *Eternal Father, Strong to Save (Green Bk 467)*

Eternal father strong to save
 Whose arm has bound the restless wave,
 Who bade the mighty ocean deep
 Its own appointed limits keep.
 Oh hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

O savior whose almighty word
 The winds and waves submissive heard
 Who walked upon the foaming deep
 And calm amid the storm didst sleep.
 Oh hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

Reading: Isaiah 40: 28-31 (in unison)

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
 The Lord is the everlasting God,
 The creator of the ends of the earth.
 He does not grow faint or grow weary;
 His understanding is unsearchable.
 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
 Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
 But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
 They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
 They shall run and not be weary;
 They shall walk and not faint.

5. Hymn: Shine Jesus Shine (WOV Blue Bk 651)

Refrain

Shine, Jesus, Shine, fill this land with the Father's glory;
 Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
 Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with love and mercy;
 Send forth your Word, Lord, and let there be light!

Verse 1

Lord, the light of your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness shining;
 Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us,
 set us free by the truth you now bring us.
 Shine on me, shine on me. Refrain

Verse 2

As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness.
 Ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here,
 may our lives tell your story.
 Shine on me, shine on me. Refrain

6. Hymn: *Simple Gifts*

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
 And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
 When true simplicity is gained,
 To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
 To turn, turn will be our delight,
 Till by turning, turning we come 'round right

7. Hymn: *Seek Ye First (WOV Blue Bk 783)*

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
 and its righteousness.
 And all these things shall be added unto you.
 Allelu, alleluia.

Ask and it shall be given unto you.
 Seek and you shall find.
 Knock and the door shall be opened unto you.
 Allelu, alleluia.

Martha & Mary – Reading and Skit: Margot Hillman & Sara George

Luke 10:38-42 (NSRV)

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

MARTHA: Well, how selfish could you be, Mary!

MARY: What do you mean, Martha?

MARTHA: You know what I mean – lounging at his feet like some love-sick teenager while I did all the work.

MARY: I'm hardly a teenager. ...

MARTHA: Gazing up at him like he holds the secrets of the world.

MARY: Well, I think he might. I wanted to listen, to drink it all in.

MARTHA: Meanwhile I scurried around making sure we had enough food, enough beer and wine and more guests than I expected.

MARY: You are so good with hospitality, Martha. Everything is always perfect. Really, you are the Saint of Cooks!

MARTHA: Right, not much thanks to you when the chips are down.

MARY: Martha, you run this entire household. And if that's not enough, you're out with your various committees and campaigns. By the way, I'm glad the midterm elections are finally over. You can rest awhile.

MARTHA: Rest?! You know we're dealing with Israel and Gaza AND Ukraine, with humanitarian aid, refugees and helping to reunite people through the Red Cross. We're dealing with hurricanes and floods in the Midwest and India. Not to mention the climate meeting. This is no time for rest, Mary.

MARY: I know, I know. You have a very full agenda. Slaying dragons everywhere. But don't you wish you could sit and just be with our guests when they come? Isn't that part of hospitality, too? And how do you recharge your batteries if you are forever running here and running there?

MARTHA: You are such a dreamer, Mary. Is there a book you haven't read yet? Where has your quiet contemplation ever gotten you? Was one more child fed? Did one more homeless person sleep in a warm bed last night?

MARY: I think... [*Martha interrupts her*]

MARTHA: Yes, indeed you think a great deal. And ponder. And meditate. And contemplate. And... [*Mary interrupts her*]

MARY: I think that we all need time to wonder, to question, to ask the big questions and seek answers. And just be. We can get so caught up in the busyness of our lives, of our commitments and responsibilities that we can lose sight of what it's all for. We need time out to marvel at the world, the stars, the cosmos. And human relationships. And ponder God himself. And how we can be the best we can be. Don't you wish you could slow down from time to time? Isn't there a time to work and a time to reflect?

MARTHA: Well, yes, I do wish I could switch myself off from time to time. In fact, when you were sitting around with him and the others, I was even a little jealous. Not of your relationship. But of your ability to sit still. To listen. And think.

MARY: I wonder, Martha, if we aren't two sides of a coin. I mean, perhaps what is best is that we try to live a life of both – of service and meditation. What is the great commandment after all but a call for love – of God and neighbor. I need you to help me with the neighbor part.

MARTHA: And I need you to help me with the God part. Perhaps they are one and the same thing.

MARY: Don't worry about what Martin Luther said about "faith alone."

MARTHA: Not to worry! My personal salvation has never been my motivation. It's been about helping make this world, this life, better for others. *Tikkun olam*.* Healing the world.

MARY: Amen to that, sister!

8. Hymn: How Great Thou Art (LBW Green Bk 532)

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the worlds thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee.
How great thou art! How great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
I hear the birds singing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.

Refrain

9. Hymn: Softly and Tenderly (WOV Blue Bk 734)

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.
See, on the portals he's waiting and watching, watching for you and for me.

Refrain:

Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home.
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, "O Sinner, come home!"

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, pleading for you and for me?

Why should we linger and heed not his mercies for you and for me. **Refrain**

Oh, for the wonderful love he has promised, promised for you and for me.

Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon, pardon for you and for me.

Refrain.

10.Hymn: *Blessed be the Tie that Binds (LBW Green Bk 370)*

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;

The unity of heart and mind is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers;

Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear;

And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.

From sorrow, toil and pain, and sin we shall be free;

And perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.

Prayers of the People (in unison)

Dear Heavenly Father, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons, those who are in prison, the homeless and destitute, the old and sick, those who struggle with addiction, those who suffer from discrimination, those who grieve, and those who are broken in body, mind or spirit. Lord, grant them comfort, courage, resilience, and relief from their pain and sorrow. Inspire and strengthen us to help as we are able. And grant us all peace. Amen

Lord's Prayer in unison

Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Forgive us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory

Forever and ever. Amen

11. Hymn: Amazing Grace (LBW Green Bk 448)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and Grace will lead me home.

Reading: Luke 10:25-27 – Stefanie Bauman

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

He said to him, “what is written in the Law? What do you read there?”

He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

And he said to him, “You have given the right answer. Do this and you will live.”

Let us go forth in Peace to love and Serve the Lord and our neighbors! Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DISMISSAL:

God has a plan. We're it!

What's our part in God's plan? Sharing God's love in joyful service!

Then let's go in peace, live in joy, and serve the Lord! Thanks be to God!

Greatly Perplexed

When we study the Gospels, we usually focus on the people who embrace the Good News of salvation through Jesus: the shepherds and the Magi, Philip and Nathanael, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, Jairus. These characters show us what belief looks like on the ground, what shapes our own spiritual lives might take, what joys the Gospel might inspire if we receive it in faith...

But what about the men and women in the New Testament who don't accept the Good News—the people who encounter the Gospel, hear its challenge, glimpse its beauty, but then turn away? What about the young rich man, who leaves in sorrow when Jesus asks him to share his wealth? What about the people of Nazareth, who refuse to look past Jesus' humble origins? What about the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the neighbors of the Gerasene demoniac, Pontius Pilate? What about Herod, who in this week's lectionary finds himself "greatly perplexed" in the presence of John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner? He's the man who likes to listen when John tells him the truth, who considers John a "righteous and holy man," who even dares to protect John from danger for a while— but in the end resists the transformative call of the Gospel and kills the one who bears him good news. What might we learn from a "failed" follower like Herod?

I ask this question in part because the story of John the Baptist's death is a brutal one if we're looking for redemption. Consider what happens as Mark describes it: a faithless tetrarch forsakes his wife to marry his brother's. When a courageous truth-teller condemns the incestuous marriage, the truth-teller finds himself in "protective custody" in a prison cell. Soon afterwards, the tetrarch throws himself a birthday party, gets drunk, and invites his stepdaughter to dance for his guests. Her performance pleases him so much that he promises her anything she

12

desires. The girl (spurred on by her mother) demands the imprisoned prophet's death.

Unwilling to lose face in front of his guests, the tetrarch keeps his promise and orders the truth-

teller's execution. Before the birthday party is over, the girl receives the prophet's head on a platter.

Where's the good news in this story? Where's the hope, the healing, the joy, the salvation? I know that we Christians are trained to slap all kinds of noble meanings on tragedy: "Nothing happens in this world unless God wills it." "God never gives anyone more than they can bear." "God's plans are always perfect, even when we don't understand them." But in terms of our lived experience, some sorrows, like those that surround John's death, still leave us reeling. They don't yield to our need for shape, sense, and closure.

So I wonder if the gospel writer gives us this hard story for another reason: not to reveal good news, but to show us what's at stake when the Good News is rejected. Maybe Herod has something to teach us by way of negative example. Maybe his is the story of what happens when we treat the Incarnate Truth too casually, too neutrally... when we approach Jesus with curiosity, perplexity, and maybe even fascination, but then get stuck, never crossing over from spectatorship to discipleship. After all, Jesus doesn't want audience members; He wants followers.

Mark's Gospel tells us that Herod "enjoys listening" to John. This is an interesting tidbit. Herod enjoys listening to a man who calls him an adulterer? Why? I think it's because the truth—sharp, hard-edged, and costly though it often is—compels us. It draws us in. In a world overrun with doctored images, fake headlines, exaggerated claims, and blatant lies, truth is precious. It draws our gaze and pricks our ears. It suggests to us that coherence and alignment are possible; we don't have to live in constant disharmony, our words, actions, and desires permanently in conflict. Something in us hungers for the truth. We fear it and need it, all at once.

In my imagination, Herod spends hours at a time sitting by John's prison cell, listening to the truth that cuts in order to heal. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, lustful for power and yet dissatisfied with what power has made of him, he asks questions. He probes. He wonders. He hopes. He fears. He learns about Jesus, the One whose sandals John feels unworthy to untie. He asks about God, baptism, forgiveness, salvation. He compares the clear authenticity of John's mission and message to his own compromised, convoluted life. And maybe, maybe, he yearns...

But then? Then the rubber hits the road. The time comes to make a decision— right over wrong, humility over power, integrity over compromise, truth over lies. The time comes to care more about saving a life than saving face... to move from a perplexed fascination with truth to a faithful stewardship of truth.

In other words, what happens in the aftermath of Herod's birthday party is the testing of the tetrarch— the testing of his character, his loyalties, his mind, his heart; the testing of his commitment to something costlier than the status quo.

13

How different the story would be if Herod passed this test. But he doesn't. He fails. When push comes to shove, his casual fascination with the truth isn't enough to transform him. He remains a hearer of the Good News, not a doer...

If you're anything like me, you're thinking, "Yeah, but I'm nothing like Herod. I've never put anyone to death. I've never sacrificed another human being to hang onto power. I've never committed murder to save face." Maybe not. But I wonder if the questions we need to ask ourselves in light of Herod's story are subtler ones. No, I don't go around killing people— but do I care too much about what other people think of me? Do I value my status, reputation, and popularity more than I do the truth? Am I so bent on conflict-avoidance that I harm others with my passivity? Do I prefer stability and safety more than transformation? Is my inner life and my outer life misaligned, one always covering for the other?

These are personal questions on the one hand, but very public ones on the other. When I choose silence for the sake of convenience, whose life becomes expendable? When I decide that justice is too messy, chaotic, or costly for me to pursue, who suffers in the long term? Whose vulnerability do I depend on and benefit from to keep my own comforts intact? These aren't good news questions — if by "good news" we mean news that makes us feel good. But they're Gospel questions. They're the questions I suspect John would ask; they're the questions I believe Jesus asks; and they're the questions both men died for asking.

To his credit, Herod begins in the right place. He begins with curiosity, with perplexity, with

desire. It's fine to begin where he does— as a listener, intrigued but uncommitted. The danger is in staying there. The danger is in deciding that a disinterested fascination with Jesus is enough. The danger is in silencing the truth that never stops trying to save us...

- Debie Thomas