

## **Holy Moments**

**Holy Cross Homily, 26-May-24**

**Edward Happ**

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" --Psalm 19:14

Please be seated

One of my former priests, instead of the usual sermon, would occasionally give what he called a BLT, a blessed little thought, a shorter reflection. So, here is my hopefully BLT this morning.

### I. Holy moments leave us speechless

For my text today I am taken up by the words of the Psalm we just read:

"The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice; the voice of the Lord is the voice of Splendor." --Psalm 29:4

Bill Moyers once interviewed Coleman Barks, the translator of the Sufi poet Rumi, sometimes called the Shakespeare of the east. In the interview he asked Coleman about his experience of ecstasy. So Coleman talked about when he was a young boy in the south, at a certain time during the year, when the sun would come in the window with a golden glow. And he would fall on the ground and hug himself and say to his mother, "Mama, I have that full feeling again." *I have that full feeling again.*

When we went to the cathedral in Detroit a few weeks ago, and sat in the wonderful splendor of that cathedral, it was easy to feel small. When the organist on

that grand instrument began to play the Bach prelude, and then we all stood and sang the hymn “Christ is made the sure foundation” together as the choir processed up the aisle, I could not sing the first verse. I was so moved, so overcome by the emotion and feeling of the Holy drawing near to us that I was speechless. I don’t know whether you’ve had that experience being choked up or being caught up in the moment, but I suspect you have.

I wrote about it in this poem:

#### That Full Feeling

I go searching for the prelude  
we heard at the Cathedral  
in Detroit,  
and it is after the first pause  
in the recording  
I am overcome anew  
with that full feeling  
that Coleman Barks described  
and I too hug myself  
until nothing is left  
except that moment  
when I cannot utter a word  
or look forward with composure  
but just crumble  
and be  
in the presence  
of all that is larger  
than  
this place  
this life  
than me.

A few weekends ago we were in Connecticut to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of a dear friend who I affectionately adopted as my Auntie Mame. This was the weekend of the northern lights, and we were reading the accounts and looking at the photos that friends posted in the evenings, as the celestial displays began. Late each night Shirley woke up and went outside with her camera in the hopes of catching a view of the lights, but the Connecticut skies were ever cloudy. So, we imagined people standing out in the streets or fields with cameras in hand, looking up at the sky in wonder as the splendor of the different shades of color appeared. We shared in their wonder vicariously in their later descriptions.

## II. The Holy Trinity

But what happens next, after the moment of awe? The words come in abundance. Every poet knows this. This is what we have heard in many Bible stories. The witnesses are admonished to “be not afraid,” to “fear not”. And what happens next? They write Psalms and Gospels with words we hear again and again. And there are no shortage words in the Bible! I was astounded to read that the King James Bible has over 7 8 3, 0 0 0 words!

Of these, “splendor” occurs just 27 times, one in the verse we just read. And “awe” occurs only 3-6 times depending on the translations. However, "The most common Hebrew word translated as "awe" is "yare" (meaning "fear" or "dread"), which appears over 400 times in the Old Testament but its often translated as "fear" in [the King James Version].

Fear not,

here ends the math lesson for the morning! ...

The point is that the words follow a time of silence, a time of being speechless. The abundance comes after the gasp, after we are without words.

Today is Trinity Sunday. The Trinity is one of those defining concepts in the history of our faith. Though the word Trinity does not occur in the Bible, the concept of Father, Son and Holy spirit is in the Great Commission at the end of Mathew's Gospel. He writes:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [Matthew 28:19]

It took the Church over 300 years of arguing about what was the right profession of the Trinity before it set it down in the Nicene Creed, which we will stand and say later in the service:

"We believe in one God, the Father...  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ...  
We believe in the Holy Spirit..."

What it is we profess is a God who is "one in three and three in one" as the theologian Karl Barth describes. How does this make sense to us?

I thought about a story here from my high school days that was triggered by the hymn we sang in March, "O wheat, whose crushing was for bread." But Shirley said it was confusing, so I took it out. Explaining the Trinity is a theological challenge, fraught with danger, as those in the 4<sup>th</sup> century found out!

And sometimes even a metaphor falls short. But when in doubt, I'm willing to say that it is a mystery. Lord, help me.

### III. God Comes to Us

Perhaps on one level this is what the Trinity means, it is *the ways God comes to us*. As we pray, "God the creator, redeemer and sustainer". And when God comes to us in Holy moments, our reaction maybe simply be speechless.

It happens in moments in our worship, particularly at Christmas and Easter, when I find again that I'm not able to sing that first verse in the processional hymn... especially Charles Wesley's hymn "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" and we sing again the Alleluia's. I'm choked up each time that those moments come. These are Holy Moments, and we're caught up in silence before the Voice of Splendor, like the shepherds in Luke's Gospel:

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

[Luke 2:8-10]

Written large, I think that's what moments of awe and wonder are about.

Written small, they are no different.

And so I'd like us each to ask ourselves, what are our holy moments? Do they happen unexpectedly, or can we find them, even create them?

The important thing I've learned is that we can choose to go to those places and times with the expectation that something will move us, whether the prelude in the

cathedral, a virtuoso violin solo, lights in the northern sky, or a riot of stars on a clear night in Upper Peninsula—the events in our church renewal program. We go with the hope of being created anew as the Holy moment comes to us.

It can also be the simple moments in our lives. I often tell my students about an advisor who told me to pay attention to the times I become Italian. Italian, I said? My mother was from an Italian family! He pointed out that when I'm engaged by something, I come alive and start gesturing with my hands like I was in a market in Florence talking about the fresh peppers that had just arrived. Pay attention to that, he said, and ask yourself where you are, what you are experiencing when you come alive like that. And what I realized is that I can choose to be in those situations again and go with the expectation that I will come alive.

Later in the interview with Coleman Barks, Bill Moyers asks him about the experiences of ecstasy that others in the Eastern faith have had. And Coleman said, "I don't know if I can talk about this." "I don't know if I can talk about this." I don't think he meant that he was forbidden to describe these, but rather that there were no words to describe the experience. It was something that just needed to be.

And so I'd like to leave you with a thought from Frederick Buechner that I've paraphrased:

Holy moments "cannot be expressed, but only experienced," before the splendor of the Lord, the most we can say is, "I have that full feeling again!"

Amen.