

From the Bishop

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A Reflection from the Bishop

Na ke aloha o ke Akua ma loko o Iesu Kristo, e aloha iā ‘oukou ā pau!

As I have talked with folk about the events around the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, I have noted how they reacted. Leaving aside the political reality of monarchy and the heritage of colonialism, some responded to the pageantry and others the physical spaces of the events. I was drawn to the words of the prayers and the hymns. Not to the grand music, but to the words. Historically, the burial office in the Book of Common Prayer did not include the proper name of the deceased (just pronouns and sister/brother). The same prayers would be said for a king or a pauper.

Spiritually, I am drawn to words more than anything else. I am rather indifferent to a hymn's tune (though the tune can help with the impact of the words). When choirs sing, I am usually busy reading an anthem's text and not listening too closely. Buildings – even grand church buildings like Canterbury Cathedral -- are OK enough. A grand Sunset is lovely. I just don't always connect through the divine in those ways or places.

Words for me are key. I want the liturgy to not only have theological meaning but for the words to flow and have a sense of poetry. At night before going to sleep, Bea often has to listen to me read aloud from the Bible (usually from the Common English Bible translation now, but on occasion from the Authorized King James), and one of the evening offices. We still read to one another. My sons have burned in their memory of when I would read poetry (especially Tennyson and Rossetti) and Shakespeare to them. I can hear God through the spoken word: in poetry, story, and ordinary conversation.

Years ago, a spiritual director highlighted for me how to listen to God. One day she gave me an old copy of *The Hymnal 1940* printed with no music and just the words of the hymns. Her invitation to me was to pray the words. We would then discuss the images and how a text might connect me to God. She would sometimes challenge the images of the hymn and challenge me to go deeper.

In recent days, I have returned again and again to the words of hymn number 653 in *The Hymnal 1982*. As I have prayed about the war in Ukraine, the social strife and threat of political violence in the United States, the reaction to vaccines and the pandemic, the crisis of the unsheltered on our streets, corruption of government officials, the political and economic refugees being displaced around the world, the climate crisis, and on and on, the words of this hymn sound in my heart. Pastorally, as considering the actions and words of some of those entrusted to my care, the words are brought home.

So, my prayer has been carried in the following words of a nineteenth century hymn (by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892):

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.*

I was initially struck by the masculine language. In my own prayer, however, I have another image emerge as I read the words aloud. As I read “Father,” I actually experience the love of a “Grandmother” gently correcting my foolish ways. I profoundly believe that being reclothed in rightful minds is the call from God – our nurturing creator -- to be the person I was meant to be.

*In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.*

My life is shaped by stories of Scripture. Do I have the courage of those first disciples to follow Jesus? Every day I pray the simple prayer of St. Richard of Chichester: “Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us, for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. Most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.”

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!

The sacredness of personality is “interpreted by love” and affirms the value of each of us as individuals before God. The basis for this principle in our Christian life is the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Christ connects us to God. This Incarnational principle affirms the sacredness of individual human persons as products of creation and the foci of redemption. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1, 14) These words from John’s gospel graphically express the reality of a God who lived, laughed, suffered, and died within our human lives. All humanity — each of us individually — is sanctified by the mere fact of the Incarnation. I am loved because of Christ Jesus.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

I forget to be still, and I continue to strive, to brood and to worry. I need God's help to quiet the voices of fear and anger in my head. I need to be reminded that I am not God. The late Bishop Richard Chang was quite fond of the saying of the 17th century Carmelite Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. Dick tried to live without "strain and stress" and by these words from Lawrence: "Think often on God, by day, by night, in your business and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave him not alone."

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.*

Through the reality of life and human frailty, I can still hear the "small voice of calm." In the end, I too will pass over to God – into God's love. "I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created." *From Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:38-39 (CEB translation)*

I invite you to pray the words – block out the music – of a favorite hymn. What do they tell you about God? Why are they important to you today?

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko makou Haku,

+Bob