

## “Waking up”

A Sermon for the Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Farnham & St. John’s Episcopal Churches

November 17, 2019 – The Rev. Torrence Harman

Texts: Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 21:5-19

How do you wake up?

Do you wake up early, or late? Use an alarm system or just rise kind of in tune with the light. Do you hop out of bed, or linger a bit longer? Do you wake up excited or in dread – or does that just depend on what’s ahead? What starts working first? Your brain running through a “to do” list, your senses yearning for the smell of coffee, your heart kicking into gear to get your blood pumping, your spirit in high gear rev’ing up the energy you need for the day ahead or opting for a little more sleep before tackling what’s ahead. Maybe your system wants to simply lounge into the day, stay in its pj’s or bathrobe for a while because the luxury of an open, no-tasks-ahead day awaits. I guess your or my answer to all this is, “It depends.” Hold that thought!

I love Creation stories. Any story that focuses on God making things. I’ve wondered such things as what it was like for God after the first (metaphorical) seven days of creation – after the seventh day/night cycle of deep rest, deep satisfaction. Then, it’s as if the creation storytellers in the Bible think the story needs to be fleshed out a little more because immediately, we have another version. The one where the picture of God making humans is a little more detailed. It’s the story about God molding a human form out of the dust, the dirt, the earth: molding, shaping a human shape. Adam – in Hebrew that word means earth. An art project in clay: an earthling. I imagine God as one of those kids in grade school art class who really got into the clay – great enthusiasm – poking and prodding and working the clay, kind of wrestling it into shape till he was relatively satisfied. God, really an amazing sculptor.

God the artist as I re-read that story of creation. And as I watch a sunset or sunrise. God splashing color all over the place. Or when I fly across the country and look down through the airplane window – how the plains, the valleys, the mountains, the rivers are woven into an amazing tapestry that even given the change of seasons seems to be an ever changing, evolving weaving or quilting design. Never finished, just cycling, recycling, reweaving a thread here, adding another quilt patch there.

After the first creation stories in Genesis comes the story of the Garden. A really big “wake-up” call. Because suddenly things start to fall apart. God’s most complex creation, the humans, really do have feet of clay. The tapestry of harmony begins to fray, to unravel. The clarity of design God hoped for begins to get muddled as a serpent slithers through the dust.

I wonder if God’s heart dropped a bit when he saw the Big Plan begin to dissemble. All that work to take all the disorder that he began with, create a beautiful, exciting order out of it and now it’s getting disordered again, falling apart.

I was at the play “Motherhood, the Musical” last night. It took me back to early (and even later) days of Motherhood. That unbelievable initial excitement over creating something new, seemingly so perfect in every way. What a miracle to be part of creating a tiny human being. But then, along comes another reality. As it all gets rather unsettled and disordered – a new norm. Even some chaos creeps in as the care of that something new challenges its parents’ calmness, even their sanity at times. And the wondering from time to time, “How will I make it through?” The constant cycle of feeding, trying to keep things in order, constant cleaning up, doing and re-doing. A lot of it is just plain messy.

The musical last night tugged at my memory. Oh, how I could identify with the songs of frustration, ones that seemed to question, “how did this happen?” and songs of escaping the drudgery. But the songs that really strummed my heart were the lullaby like songs. The poignant ones that also resonated with my memories, but at an even deeper level. I looked around the room and it wasn’t just the women/the wives/the moms/the grandmas who were relating to the entire range of music, but the guys/the dads/grandads/husbands who were laughing or if not moistened about the eyes at least had a mellowed, melted look about them. The lullabies got us all. Aren’t lullabies simply melodies that soften give a quiet glow to another level of reality that lives in our heart space even in the midst of exhaustion? Then the feeling, “It’s all worth it!”

This morning our readings for the day seem to reflect the ups and downs – the crazy, exhausting, reality of the process called Creation. God, through the prophet Isaiah is announcing: “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth!” I wonder if God’s voice as Isaiah received it is excited or tired or resigned. It’s the beginning of yet another new day. How do we imagine God feels this day as he is waking up to the reality that once again he has to roll up his sleeves and get to work, yet again try to order the chaos that is emerging once more? How is he getting up out of his bed after a seventh day rest? How is he greeting this “next” morning facing re-working things, yet again. Would God like to hunker down under the covers again, or is he excited about getting to work?

And Luke’s little apocalyptic (end times) soliloquy voiced by Jesus this morning. Jesus, a creator too, sent to help the world of humans get re-created. Jesus is the one who is supposed to usher in a cycle of renewal in the world – a new order, a new way of getting back to God’s original design. Jesus’ dramatic intense monologue here this morning is really part of this cycle of creation. He’s predicting, prophesying how before completion of the cycle of renewal things are going to really fall apart in a big way. It’s the big messy middle part of the cycle of order, disorder, re-order. The old must fall apart it appears before the pieces can be reordered, reworked, some pieces discarded, some new things worked in to create the new order. It’s the vision of a Creator yet again wrestling with the form of its Adams (earthlings), then forcing this new shape to breathe again (like a new baby at birth must) gulping in another first breath as God revitalizes the form with divine breath.

The basic, over-riding story line of the Bible (Old Testament and New) is the story of creation, disorder and re-creation – an always cycling, recycling rhythm of making all things new again and again and again. The disorder, the falling apart, seems to be absolutely necessary in this scheme of things, or at least a reality that cannot be escaped in such an evolutionary process of becoming whatever that original Divine Design and always with us Divine Designer longed for at the very beginning and continues to long for. Here’s an interesting question: Was this cycle of order, disorder, reorder part of the original plan as God intended it? Or was it a surprise to God too, to find that for the design to come to fruition it would involve an underlying cycle of beginnings, endings, and new beginnings. Or, to use another set of cyclical words: birth, death, rebirth.

God’s voice in our exciting Old Testament scripture this morning together with Jesus’ words of warning in the New Testament Gospel scripture points us to the unescapable reality that we are part of this cycle, that it is a re-cycling process and that it will be messy and it certainly won’t be easy.

In the work of creating new heavens and a new earth, I believe that as scripture unfolds, we begin to see that we are the clay, the stuff of creation that needs to be worked and re-worked and re-formed. But, also, we, as Jesus so dramatically promotes in the Gospels are to be disciples/workers/co-creator workers with the Divine to make God’s ultimate Design come to pass. And just look at our lives, a constant cyclical process of birthing, dying, re-birthing. The old passes away and something new is created out of the old pieces of our lives. Redemption and renewal. And the reality is that we are not just ones called to be re-borned, but also to be mid-wives, mid-

husbands in that process. It isn't easy to birth a new Way, a new heaven and a new earth, but when it includes an intertwining of heaven and earth, we can't escape the call, the requirement, to be part of the process. We may embrace it, we may fight it, we may try to avoid it, but we are in it.

Apocalyptic writings such as what we are facing in our scripture readings today as we head into Advent are basically about "waking up." So back to the wake-up theme:

And so how do I wake up. After many years of mostly being a wake up, hit the floor running type of waker-upper as I have continued to age and hopefully mellow some, I find many mornings that lingering a little to gather my energy for the day ahead works better for me. Taking this time to consider and marshall my resources for the day ahead. Since doing this, I have found a sense of gratitude seems to creep into the vision of the day ahead for me. A thankfulness for the gift a day ahead presents. Sort of a feeling of: "This is the day the Lord has made; rejoice and be glad in it." However, I am now realizing that in the morning the day has not yet been "made" yet. Each day offers the possibility of being made new again. Both for me and for the world. Each day's shape will emerge as God tries to mold it towards that Divine vision that he holds dear in his heart. That design includes each of us, as both a created part of that design and as earthly helpers to bring that design about. So, my new morning prayer now, when I take the time to pause at each day's beginning is: "This is the day the Lord **is making**. Oh, Lord, show me how to be and what to do to help you in it!"

And then, after a long day, I long to feel the childhood rhythm of being held, rocked and lullabied to sleep. To the music we all long to hear. A Divine loving voice as we slip into sleep. "You are loved. Well done, little one; well-being little one. Sleep now. Tomorrow is a new day." And then, I imagine God resting too.