

A HOMILY

T-5/17/2022

(3:50 p.m.)

PREPARED BY KENNETH LEE TAYLOR, A.B., M.A., PH.D.
FOR DELIVERY IN SERVICES AT

ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, BELFAST, MAINE

ON
SUNDAY, 22 MAY 2022

EASTER VI

at
8:00 A.M. and 10:25 A.M.

YEAR C

MP II

EARTH-MAKER, PAIN-BEARER, LIFE-GIVER

IN THE NAME OF OUR GOD: CREATOR... REDEEMER... SUSTAINER... AMEN.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST

Sometimes the Lessons appointed display an

obvious singular focus; sometimes, as with today's

readings, upon first glance (or first hearing), they

may seem to be "all over the place" — today we

we have a vignette from the narrative of the

missionary travels of Saint Paul and his

companion that begins with a nocturnal

vision (^{likely} perhaps a vision in a dream); followed by

a Psalm, a Hebrew poem of ^{harvest} thanksgiving ^{including} ~~with~~

a prayer that the blessing might continue; and

then another vision, this one an apocalyptic

manifestation of ^a city of light and ^{life emerging} ~~light~~ from a state of prophetic illumination whose imagery echoes the 40th chapter of the Book of Ezekiel; and finally, ^{part of} a theological discourse from John's gospel in the form of a speech by Jesus.

The sheer variety of the writing put me in mind of a passage from the late Rev. Peter

Jones's THE GOOD BOOK: READING THE BIBLE WITH MIND AND HEART (1936):

"Bible study," says Jones, "actually involves the Study of the Bible. That [^{requires} ~~requires~~] a certain amount of work, a certain exchange of informed intelligence, a certain amount of discipline. Bible study is certainly not just the

Response of the uninformed reader to

the uninterpreted text, | but Bible

study in [many] churches has become

just that, [amounting to] the blind

leading the blind or, as some caustic

critics of liberal Protestantism [have]

put it, the blind leading the blind.

The notion that texts have meaning

and integrity, | intention, | contexts, |

and subtexts, || and that they are part

of an enormous history of interpreta-

tion that has long involved some of

the greatest thinkers in the history of

the world, is a notion often lost

on those for whom the text is just
one more of the many means

the church provides to massage the
egos of its members" or - I would

^{to gouge here} add_n - in the case of many_n ^{politicized} jump

and shout / Hellfire and damnation /
fundamentalist churches, to bludgeon

the self-esteem of their members or to
^{political} brow-beat them with disinformation

and conspiratorial nonsense. (You ^{Don't take my word for this -}

can read about this in Tim Alberta's article
in the Context (June) issue of the Atlantic
- or look up "Pastor Greg Locke on
magazine.) the internet!

"Opening the Bible is the easy part," says

James: "What to do with it once it is opened is more difficult." James then says, "At the start of Lent each year, when the time for taking up a Lenten discipline is upon us, invariably a number of people will tell me that they intend to read the Bible from cover to cover. [NOT IN 40 DAYS, I TRUST!]

They mean to start at Genesis [chapter one, verse one] and stop when they get to Revelation [chapter 22, verse twenty-one, and the final words of the Hebrew-Christian scriptures, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the

saints, Amen." (NOAB-RRSV, 387 NT)].

The enterprise is not as easy as it sounds, [of course - is it?], and

people begin to waver in their resolve

when their expectations of narrative

inspiration are not sustained by

genealogies, codes of Jewish Law, and

[the complexities of]

ancient Jewish history. The New Testa-

ment is somewhat [less daunting],

in part because it is smaller and

its subject more easily identified as

Jesus and the early [Christian] Church.

Nevertheless, it is not always clear what

is going on in the Acts of the Apostles if

the expectation that the letters of Paul provide a systematic correspondence is often disappointing; and while they find it fascinating, not many know what to make of the Book of Revelation. Those who get through usually feel as if they have run a marathon, where the object of the course is to finish and not necessarily to observe the landscape along the way."

(James. Good Book, pp. 12-13)

The regular weekly lectionary from the Bible readings in our church, by contrast, do afford us opportunity to "observe the

8.
Landscape along the way," at best usually
only in brief glimpses.

But patterns may be discerned.

Connective threads can be detected.

Themes emerge.

In the weeks since the last Sunday

of Epiphany, for example, when the gospel

appointed was Luke's account of the Trans-

figuration, we've encountered nearly a

dozen "visionary" experiences of one kind

or another, all of which suggest that we
difficult

live in two worlds, the world of reason

and the five senses, and a realm that can

be called the world of the spirit.

In the same three-month span, often intersecting or over-lapping these "visions," we've seen, ^{recurring} images and motifs and themes: —
 of dwelling places, home-coming, hospitality, and safety and security in the lessons.

The story of the Prodigal Son on the 4th Sunday in Lent is probably the most poignant and searing of these.

It's also worth noting, I think, ~~and~~ ^{not just} ~~only~~ incidentally, that the language of the Collect for the Last Sunday of Epiphany —
 "grant, ^{to us} that we, beholding by faith the light of [Jesus's] countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross" (BCP, 217) is reflected (if

you will permit me the word-play!) in the language of verse one of today's Psalm (67):

"may God in / show us the light of his countenance and come to us," which, in turn, echoes the language of the familiar blessing of the Book of Numbers:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
 the Lord make his face to shine
 upon you, and be gracious to you;
 the Lord lift up his countenance
 upon you, and give you peace.
 (NUMBERS 6: 24-26)

as well as in the images of light and the promise of comfort in today's reading from Revelation. Connective threads, common themes.

Hospitality. . . today's reading from Acts tells us of the conversion of Lydia in Philippi in

Macedonia, whence ^{Paul} ~~he~~ had been called in a
 dream vision. (Cf. Reader's Digest Who's Who in
 Having arrived,
the Bible, pp. 273-274), On a Sabbath Day

Paul and his companions speak to a gathering
 of women. Among them is Lydia, who,
 along with her household, is baptized.

What is the first thing Lydia does after
 her baptism? She invites Paul and others
 to stay at her house. Her first response
 to the Good News is to provide hospitality
 to others.

The idea of hospitality can also be found
 in today's gospel reading. In it Jesus declares
 that he and "the Father" will make

their home with us. It's a wild idea - that
human benign might offer hospitality to the
 divine, but it's not without precedent, both
 in the Hebrew scriptures and in classical
 mythology (think of Abraham ^{and Sarah} and of the
 home hold of Lot; think of Baucis and Philemon
 visited by Zeus and Hermes [Ovid])

(cf. xenia ritualised guest-friendship;
theoxenia when a god is involved)

(cf. echo in Acts 14:17-12 - Barnabas - Zeus;
 Paul - Hermes)

How do we respond to this desire (if we
 may use that term) of the Divine to dwell
 with us? Can we make room in our
 lives for God to reside? Are we ^{prepared} ~~ready~~
 to offer hospitality to God? Or are the

houses of our souls too cluttered? What might it mean for Jesus and "the Father" to make their home with us? Perhaps not all of us are given the gift of hospitality like Lydia, but God wants to reside in all of us. Have we dusted off the welcome mat? Is our guest room ready? (cf. EDD, Easter VI, 2013!)

There is a pre-condition for this indwelling of the Divine. When Jesus says, "we will come to them and make our home with them, "them" means "those who love [Jesus] [and] keep [this] word." And what is this word? We were reminded of that

in last week's gospel reading. At the end of the Passover meal, the "Last Supper," after Judas Iscariot has left the room, Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." (John 13:34) This mandatum novum, this "new commandment" of Maundy Thursday, of course ^{is} no more nor less than a re-focusing or sharpening of the point of Jesus's elsewhere in the gospels to the question answer ~~of~~ what is the greatest commandment: Love God, Love your neighbor.

one of my favorite lines from
I'm reminded of Robert Frost's ("Birches":)

...earth's the right place for love;
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
(ll. 52b-53)

Or Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (in The Sirens of Titan):

"[the] purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved."

Or the ~~new~~ song on Eddie Vedder's ^{new} album

"Earthling": "Can you hear? / Are we

clear? / in when we love, we're invisible."

Then begins what is known as "Jesus' farewell

discourse" (14:1-17:26) (NAB-NRSV, 148NT, et seq)

a disquisition that occupies four full chapters,

of John, of which today's selected reading is but a ^{very} small

part. It begins with the opening words of

chapter 14, which we know so well, which

I remember from the King James transla-

tion and my recitations for the Bible

to win a week at
camp in Rummey, 16.
N.H.

(founded 1947)

Memory Association (BMA) in the 1930's (now

the Scripture Memory Association - SMA):

Our NRSV Lectionary reads

"Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me. In

my father's house are many dwelling

places. If it were not so, would I

have told you that I go to prepare a

place for you? And if I go and prepare

a place for you, I will come again and

will take you to myself, so that where

I am, there you may be also.

(John 14:1-3)

There we have it again: Hospitality...

Homecoming.

These words of comfort for the disciples
are intended by the writer of John's gospel
as words of comfort for us as well.

We all know that life is difficult and
that it is also too often painful and dangerous.
And we often need respite, solace, comfort.

In his novel Breakfast of Champions (1973)

Vonnegut has his character of the writer Kilgore

Tront hitching a ride with a truck driver, who

engages him in conversation. "I can't tell

if you're serious or not," said the driver. "I

don't know myself until I find out if life is

serious or not," said Tront. "It's dangerous,

I know, and it can hurt a lot. That doesn't

necessarily mean it's serious too." (!!!)

Another novelist, Michael Chabon

(Wonder Boys, 1995, film dir. by Chris Hanson,

w/ Michael Douglas, et al, 2000. cf. Bob Dylan's

Oscar-winning song, "Things Have Changed"),

writing a few years ago (in the New York

Review of Books) on the films of Wes Anderson

(Bottle Rocket, 1995; Bushmore, 1998; The Royal

Tennentbaum, 2001; The Life Aquatic with

Steve Zissou, 2004; The Darjeeling Limited, 2007;

Fantastic Mr. Fox, 2009; Moonrise Kingdom, 2012;

The Grand Budapest Hotel, 2014; Isle of Dogs, 2018;

The French Dispatch, 2021), says:

"The world is so big, so complicated,

so replete with marvels and surprises

that it takes years for most people
 to begin to notice that it is, a tsu,
irretrievably broken. We call this
 period of research 'childhood'."

"we call this period of research
 'childhood.'" (!)

Few, if any, of us emerge from this
 "period of research" unscathed. We've all
 been wounded to some degree or other. Some
 of us emerge strengthened by adversity,
 grateful for survival, "glad to be alive" as

~~the song by~~ the Canadian country rock music
 Blue Rodeo group, declares in a song of that title, "wanting
 to help others ^{prepared} to be with them in joy and

in sorrow. Others, sadly, emerge fearful, and hateful and destructive. Lately, thinking about the wanton destructiveness around us, it even appears that many of us — perhaps as many as a third of our fellow Americans — ^{simply} haven't grown up at all.

^{many years ago}
I used to say, jokingly, "You're only young once, but you can be immature forever" or "You're only young once, but you can act like an adolescent forever."

^{so}
But that's not funny anymore.

It's only one angle from which to view the current Emacy, but doesn't the failure to see very obvious facts and phenomena as

They are childish, to say the least?

Abraham Lincoln is credited with asking rhetorically, "How many legs does a dog have if you call his tail a leg? Four. Saying that a tail is a leg does it make it a leg?"

Over one million people in America have ^{now} died from the coronavirus, COVID-19. Yet people persist in refusing to wear masks as appropriate and insist that the pandemic is a hoax.

Mass shootings have become ^{almost} commonplace in America, the horror in Buffalo is the latest example. In 2020, the most recent year for which complete data are available, 45,222 ^{American} ~~people~~ died from gun-related injuries, and we

seem helpless ~~to~~ to address the issue rationally
like adults!

and sensibly, even though seventy to eighty

percent of Americans support stricter gun con-

trol. In this regard, the average American thinks

that 54% of us own a gun - ^{in fact} but _{only} 32%^{in fact}

actually do own a gun. (Harper's Index) ^{June 2022 issue}

The tantrum-prone, childish, ^{over} among us

have been forming at the mouth increasingly

over LGBTQ issues. The average American believes

that 21% of the U.S. population is trans gender.

The actual number is 0.6 percent of the popu-

lation. (Harper's Index) ^{June 2022 issue}

Hate crimes... Misinformation... Disinforma-

tion... conspiracy theories... new forms of the

old, hateful prejudices of misogyny, racism,
 homophobia... signs of growing far-right ex-
 tremism... white supremacist agitations...
 revival of 1920's-era "replacement" theory...
 INSURRECTION!
 climate-change denial. (See Cynthia Miller-Tatiss

Hate in the Homeland. Princeton, 2020; \$29.95)

(See also Sarah Posner: UNHOLY: How White Christian

Nationalists Powered the Trump Presidency, and

the Devastating Legacy They Left Behind. 2020)

Is it any wonder that Christians (and
 others) might long for escape from this vale
 of tears or take comfort from a dream of an
 eternal city - free of the suffering and
 heart-ache and impoverishment and violence

that enslaves here?

Reflecting on this, I recalled the title of
 a Richard Wilbur poem, "Love Calls us to the
 Things of this World" (Wilbur, I'm happy
 to report was a fellow Episcopalian in 1921-2017, and
 they via a similar vein,
 96 years, Belmont, Mass.) and, then, ^I remembered
 E.B. White's exuberant statement, "Living is a
 task of such immediacy, variety, beauty and
 excitement that [we are] powerless to resist
 its wild embrace."

("A Report in January," Essays of E.B.W.
 NY, 1977, 76; epigraph Tenckstone, May 5)

As antidote to pessimism, our three-thou-
 sand-year faith tradition, and the scriptures
 that express it, and the life of our Lord Jesus,

and the authority of our own experience tell
 us that a vein of goodness and love does
 run through the universe.

The "light of God's countenance" has been
 and can be seen; God's "ways" and His
 "saving health" have been, and can be, seen,
 from time to time, and here and there
 upon earth, if we have the eyes to see, the
 vision and imagination to apprehend and
 contemplate them, || as did Saint Paul, as
 did the author of Revelation, as did the
 prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah,
 as did the many writers of the Psalms, as did
 Lydia.

We know God by spiritual vision, and we can feel at home, on the earth, in the universe.

That is what today's Psalm is telling us, and that is what today's reading from Revelation tells us with its powerful symbolic language:

"In the spirit the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the

glory of God is its light, and its Lamp
is the Lamb."

(Revelation 21:20; 22-23)

I want to close with the last few

lines of a long poem by Campbell McGrath

that's in the current issue of The New Yorker

It's a wonderful, powerful poem.

(May 23, 2022). It's a "must read" It's almost
a 21st century analogue of Revelation:

Right now, I tell you

I am listening to something that says

let it go, fear not, rise

along with me

into a sky the color of amethyst and copper dust.

It is not a voice, it is not even a bird,

but I am listening.

I believe it may be the light

itself speaking to me,

because the sun ~~is~~ arriving, robed in gold,

as the sun is continuously arriving

at one horizon only to depart from another -

it is perpetual daybreak, do you see,

it is time's corollary,

time's counterweight

! to the pendulum of our grief, it is

that all-consuming journey into Trance,
the down

"The Mercy Supermarket," ll. 117-113)

may God grant us assurance in our faith;

strength to endure life's pain and difficulties;

and compassion, generosity and love to

be a loving and hospitable ^{people, will always} ~~who~~ welcome

others in Christ's name.

Amen!

(5-5/2)/2022, 3:58 P.M.

