

Homemaking, God's First Grace

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron,
with the People of St. Mary's, Anchorage

Christ the King Sunday

Sunday, November 21, 2021

Scripture: Genesis 1; Luke 15:3-10

We have heard, this morning, two familiar and well-loved readings from Scripture.

To those, I want to add a poem by Phoebe Newman. The poem's title is *She's in Her Kitchen....All's Right with the World.*

I want to tell you about this kitchen. It is - in spite of what you have probably been taught - what I know best. Oh, I know I'm not what you expected! S'posed to be a man. Right? Older? Real sincere lookin?...and DEFINITELY White! Even nowadays when more liberated folks say "She" instead of "He," nobody really expects God to be a 43-year-old colored lady, barefooted in the kitchen, catching up on the ironing.....But that's what I do and that's who I am. Take it or leave it, sugar! (PS: I advise you to take it!)

What it's about, I've found, IS catching up on the ironing, IS getting a nice pot of soup going on the stove, IS patting little children on the head when they pass by, IS making sweet boiled custard.

Think on it. What do you want most of all, most days? A LAP! Somebody to cuddle you up and rock, say Pore Baby, feed you with a spoon and never look at no clock, never say Whoa, I gotta do such and so.

I know that! That's how I got to be God when that old white man passed on. I'm not saying he didn't do good! Worked real hard, created the world and so on. And raised him up that boy who did some FINE miracles. I appreciate all that. I would miss it if it wasn't here.

I just think my job now is to smooth it all out. To lay clean, ironed sheets on everybody's little bed, and say Uh-huh and Yes, Ma'am...and call folks by their heart's name - call old men 'Candy' and whiney little girls 'Pudding Head.' To give folks a chance to sit and rock and feel peaceful, looking out on their lives. Hum a little in the evening. Get tired old women to spoon up next to their tired old men in the night, and crochety old uncles to pull quarters out their ears for the children. Convince folks to laugh loud and ease their spirits from time to time so light just SHINES out their scrunched up little eyes.

Fact is, though, there is some people just can't stand to be touched. My hardest task is trying to pull them into this kitchen for a hug, some praise, a little bowl of cornbread and buttermilk, and get 'em all warmed up, smiling, flapping their hands around, begging for more...more...more...¹

Now, the astute among us this morning have already noticed that right on the cover of today's Order of Service, it says that today is Christ the King Sunday, and our

¹ Poem by Phoebe Newman. Included in *Written with a Spoon: A Poet's Cookbook*, Nancy Fay and Judith Rafaela, eds. Sherman Asher Pub, 2001. Used with permission.

singing today has been consistent with that theme. AND neither this poem, nor the Scripture that we have read seem particularly....um, *kingly*.

You're right.

What I'm going to ask us to do, this morning, is to consider an image of God as Homemaker--not *instead of* God as King, but *alongside* it.

There are at least 3 reasons why:

1. Next Sunday begins Advent (the 4 Sundays before Xmas), and our theme this year is *Close to Home*. We'll be thinking a lot together about home--
 - a. The home we long for
 - b. Creating home for others.....
2. More personally, Norm and I have been moving from a condo into a new-to-us house, so the idea of making a home is current for us, and
3. It provides an opportunity for me to share Phoebe Newman's poem, that I have long loved.

I've been helped, this week, by reading *Keeping Place: Reflections on the Meaning of Home* by Jen Pollock Michel.² Michel makes the case that the first creation narrative (Genesis 1) --while sharing similarities with other creation narratives of the Ancient Near East, it also differs in important ways. Most notably, many creation stories in the surrounding cultures included creation as the work of warring gods, intent on demonstrating their superiority to other Gods. God the King, as it were.

In Genesis, however, she argues, creation is recorded as a series of actions of *purposeful hospitality*. God creates a world that welcomes Human by providing a safe, warm place with everything that we need.

² Intervarsity Press, 2017.

The first six days of creation can be read as creating a world that is not so much *useful* as it is *hospitable*.

This welcome, Michel asserts, is God's first grace to us--and another welcome, to another home, will be the final grace of our lives. Salvation, then, can be understood not simply as *pardon* by an appeased judge, but as a *welcome* into a new way of being, a new home.

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There is much between these First and Final Graces.

And in between the two, in our day-to-day living with others,

we long for the deep belonging and welcome of home, don't we?

At St. Mary's we acknowledge that every time we say, *All Are Welcome*,

which we know to be true, and also something that we are always working to make real.

I confess that I encounter very few folx who are looking for a defense of an All-Powerful, Sovereign God; but every day, I encounter real people who long for someone to throw open a door and breathe in *belonging*, and welcome.

The most well-known (and well-loved) parable of Jesus involves a son

Leaving, and returning home--and upon returning,

finding that belonging never ended.

And just preceding that parable is the one we read today--

With housekeeping, and Grace found at the end of a broom bristle.

The Church is not wrong to draw our attention to Christ the King, and God as Sovereign,

but as a people who strive to imitate God, it's important to keep our images of God plenteous and varied.

Much harm has been done--

To people, to this earth, our island home, and to our selves--

by grounding ourselves too much in God in Charge

and too little in God the Homemaker.

And so this morning, let us consider

our call to worship a Homemaker God,

and our commission to make a home for others in this world.

I wonder how thinking in this way might change not only what we *do*,

and also our *experience* of doing.

It's the difference in cleaning house because it needs cleaning,

and cleaning house to prepare for a beloved guest is coming to visit.

We hang our best towels, and it's a prayer for warmth and comfort;

We fluff the pillows, imagining sitting here, basking in the presence of those we see too seldom;

We vacuum the car, planning a drive to share our experience of a favorite hike or view;

We fix the thing that we've lived with, to keep our guests from having the inconvenience that we've tolerated for ourselves.

In short, we right the physical space as a vital part of creating a welcoming, hospitable space for others.

How can we continue God's creating work

by creating a world that is hospitable for earth's creatures,

for Human,

and for our deepest selves?

How can we offer a lap,

call others by their real names,

smooth things out,

remembering the Grace of Welcome

and offering it to others?