

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

April 21, 2024

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Praxis During Climate Crisis

Isaiah 57:19-21

“Peace, peace, to the far and the near, saith the Lord; I will heal them. But the wicked are like tossing seas that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud. There is not peace, saith my God, for the wicked.”

Romans 7:15-25

“I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but everything I hate. Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree the law is good. But in fact, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...So I find it to be the law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God (that lives) in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in me. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord...”

Matthew 7:21

“Not everyone who shouts ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who do the will of my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 7:24-27

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built a house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew but the house did not fall. Because it had been founded on rock. But everyone who hears my words and does not act on them is like the foolish one who built a house on sand. The storms came and the house fell - fell greatly.

Many feel overwhelmed by the problems of our times.
Mainly because they seem so huge and looming.
But let me try to shrink them a bit by the reminder,
that many of those problems are the result
of little wrongs that we have done
accumulating over l-o-n-g periods of time.

Numerous cancers, most addictions,
most wars and conflicts,
failed marriages, failed businesses, failed churches,
failed children, happen
because many little problems, many little bad behaviors
were ignored, avoided and accumulated
till things got out of hand.

Our Gospel reading this morning offers us great wisdom:
It's not the storms of life that matter the most,
it's the foundations upon which you build your life.

Now, many Christians take this bible passage to mean
"We have to believe in Jesus and all will be well."

But, being honest to the context of Jesus' teaching,
Belief isn't the main point - Practice is!

*"Shouting 'Lord, Lord' won't help one enter the kingdom of heaven.
Only those who do the will of my Father in heaven."*

The “Foundation” of which Jesus speaks, is Praxis;
(P-R-A-X-I-S)

That’s practice times ten; when practice
becomes habit, routine, discipline, life-style.

Praxis is the evidence of one’s religion.

Praxis is the foundation of Jesus
that either weathers life’s storms or not.

There are many Christians whose foundation is built
on shifting sands:

they don’t vote like Jesus, spend like Jesus,
live like Jesus, love like Jesus.

In other words, they don’t have Christian praxis.

It’s like the couch potato

who was told he needed to get more exercise.

So he decided to do 100 crunches every morning
and another 100 crunches every evening.

Potato chips in the morning, Doritos at night!

That is discipline in word only - not in deeds.

When deeds & discipline meld together that’s Praxis.

Now on to one of the main problems we face
in this day and age - Climate Crisis.

No problem we face is more the result
of bad living habits accumulating over time.

No problem is more the result of poor discipline
than Climate Crisis.

No problem is more a lack of Christian praxis.

We've been eating Doritos and potato chips for too long!
And we know it!

That's the amazing thing about this problem.

We know our life-styles are the problem,
we just don't want to change our disciplines.

Oh! Individually we may want to,
but collectively, politically, economically,
we don't.

Most of us know we should eat less meat and dairy
because those industries - as they are practiced now -
devastates CO2-eating forests.

Most of us know we should cut back on flying
and cut back on buying gas-guzzling cars and trucks
because the carbon emissions are warming the earth.

Most of us know we should reduce energy use at home:
-relying less on air conditioning
-not having homes that leak heat like sivs,
-and not heating with oil, kerosene, propane
other fossil fuels.

Most of us know we should preserve green spaces, grass lands, rain forests, coral reefs - and not buy products that come from their destruction.

Most of us know that we should invest in companies who care for the environment instead of those who don't.
(Did you know that 8 oil companies in the world are responsible for 70% of the world's carbon emissions?)

Most of us know we should reduce and recycle our waste.

And most of us know to vote for those leaders who advocate for the environment instead of those who advocate for the oil industry.

Most of us know what disciplines we need to practice, but we don't have the personal or collective fortitude to change.

We are so much like the Apostle Paul:

I do not understand my actions.

For I do not do what I want, but everything I shouldn't.

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

Now some Christian will get defensive.

They counter by saying,

**“Paul wasn't talking about Climate Crisis,
Paul was talking about following Christ!”**

But I say to them,
if you truly followed Christ;
if you practiced what Jesus preached
we wouldn't have climate crisis.

Loving one's neighbors, having compassion for poor,
not living greedily, being generous, living simply,
being honest, finding the sacred in God's creation,
and most of all learning how to sacrifice -
if we followed Christ
(as Paul wished he could do better)
there would be no climate crisis.

Climate crisis is literally our modern manifestation
of those storms that beat against the foundations,
those winds that blast foundations,
those floods that threatened to wash away
our foundations.

And the only way we shall persevere and remain
standing is if our foundations - our habits,
our routines, our life-styles, our daily disciplines
are built around the one who is our cornerstone:
Jesus Christ our Lord.

But in closing, let me say I have hope.
Kathrine Hayhoe, in her great climate change book,
entitled, *Saving Us*, says,

In order to create the change that is needed,
everyone needs to agree on the same 4 things:
Climate crisis will affect where I live,
whom I love, what I love doing, what I believe.

And millions & millions agreed on all of these
-at least for a moment-
when they watched the total eclipse.

How many of you watched it? Wow, that's great!
We watched it in Winooski,
sitting on the bank of the river
with our children and grandchildren
and about 500 total strangers -
a mixture of all ages, ethnicities, classes, countries,
and I'm sure politics and religions.

As the sunlight waned,
all eyes were pointed in the same direction: heavenward.
We all obediently put on our funky glasses.
"Woos" and "ahhs" floated in the warm breeze.
It was easy to hear people commenting
about the encroaching shadows;
it wasn't your typical sunset-ing light,
but rather an eerie diffuse otherworldly gray.

Darker, darker, darker. Cooler, colder, chilly,

the sun was slowly covered by the moon,
until - black - a total eclipse.

For a moment total silence;
awestruck & wonder-full silence.

Then cheers went up as the diamond ring of light
began to peak around that pitch black orb.

Truly a holy moment - regardless of your religion.
And a moment to breed hope regarding Climate Crisis.

-When was there such a time
when so many millions were all outdoors together
eyes to the heavens,
all caught up in common amazement
all part of a single community of reverence
for a moment that transcended all that divides us
all those differences we so often use as wedges.

Suddenly, we weren't Vermonters, or Americans,
we were Earthlings - and we were sharing a planet.
There were no science deniers watching the eclipse.
Everyone was experiencing the same scientific facts
and believing in them.
Everyone was protecting their eye-sight
because science told them they must.

No conspiracy experts - only believers

who could feel on their skin and all around them
a mini-experience of climate change.

We were living as one.

We were all fellow human beings - mere mortals all -
watching the universe perform a waltz
in front of our very eyes

And I heard murmuring all around me:

“What a once-in-a-lifetime event.”

And I thought to myself - praxis!

All lifetimes are made up of events done once -
then again and again and again,
until it becomes praxis.

And I told Esther,

**“Perhaps nothing can help us to see the light of climate
crisis more than the darkness of this total eclipse.”**

Prayer of Pastoral Care Easter 4 April 21, 2024

Psalm 23 says: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ...: He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Ps.23: 1,3b. Let us offer our prayers to the shepherd of our souls, saying,

God of goodness and mercy, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for the nations of the world. Anoint all leaders with your wisdom so that they will use their power to help the poor and defend the vulnerable. We pray for an abundance of aid for civilians and hostages in Gaza as we pray for a cease-fire. Be with the people of Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and in all places undergoing war & violence in these days. May we protect democracy, elections and all election workers in our own land.

God of goodness and mercy, **hear our prayers.**

On this Earth Day Sunday, we pray for our planet earth, our mother and our home. May we and all people be good stewards of its resources and work to protect its abundance of life. We pray for the many who suffer from the effects of a warming climate and rising seas. May we be willing to sacrifice short-term gains, that we may make sustainable choices of life styles for the generations to come.

God of goodness and mercy, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for this community. Strengthen those who work each day to heal the sick, welcome refugees, and help sisters and brothers in need. We pray for friends and loved ones. Comfort all who are suffering; walk with them through dark valleys and restore them, and restore them, body, mind, and soul.

God of goodness and mercy, **hear our prayers.**

We lift before you in prayer those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

Loving God, by the power of your Spirit, help us to love one another with the love of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

HYMN # 619 My Life Flows On

OFFERING How does God's love abide in anyone who has the goods of this world, and sees a brother or sister in need, yet refuses to help? With love for God and neighbor, let us offer our lives to the Lord.

OFFERTORY Appalachian Psalm

*DOXOLOGY

*PRAYER Gracious God, we give you thanks. Show us how to share Christ's love by giving our lives for one another; to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

*CLOSING HYMN # 696 *For Beauty of Meadows*

