

Three Part Harmony

Our three readings today lay out for us as plain as day what it means to join in God's plan for this world.

If you ever wondered what God is up to, if you ever wondered what we are supposed to be up to, today's readings are golden.

They unlock the door.

They shine a light upon our path.

A path made up of God's three part harmony.

The first chord in that harmony begins with Peter.

Our thick headed saint who, like me, is so often left scratching his noggin at the strange ways of God.

Today, Peter has a vision.

Not a dream as much as an invasion by the sacred world into this world.

And what this invasion says to Peter is that the veil separating the sacred from the profane, is torn apart.

That just as everything in the sacred world is holy, so too, by the death and resurrection of our Lord, all creation is also holy.

Which comes as a shock to a lifelong Jew like Peter.

Precisely because the Jewish people were called by God, and separated out by God from the rest of humanity, in order to show the rest of humanity how to become truly human.

The Jewish people are marked off from other people by two signs.

The men are circumcised and certain foods are off limits.

These signs are their identity.

To lose them is to risk losing who they are.

Which is the funk Peter finds himself in today.

How do we let others in without losing who we are?

Which becomes the earliest crisis the church faces.

Because it's not just about food.

After declaring all of the previously forbidden animals clean, God then declares all previously forbidden people (that would be us gentiles) also clean.

How do we let others in without losing who we are?

That chord in God's three part harmony sounds like this:

"The kingdom of God is the story of how we learn how NOT to call anyone profane or impure.

The kingdom of God is the story in which there are, in fact, no impure or profane people.

Even people who think of themselves as disgusting learn to stop thinking that way, in the kingdom of God.

Because the very things we so quickly reject — are full of the presence of God.” James Allison, paraphrased.

Isn't that what's happening in Peter's vision?

All kinds of foods, determined by our cultures and customs to be dirty, impure and thus untouchable are, by God's express command, good, holy and worthy.

Increase that circle to now include human beings, like those living outside our gates up and down Kanoa Street.

Who are they?

They are people — many of whom are druggies, thieves, prostitutes, and thus untouchable.

Yet Peter's vision makes one thing unmistakable: no one is outside of God's embrace.

Which means, no one can be outside of ours.

And so the first chord in God's three part harmony might be called "acceptance."

Acceptance of all things and all people — as inherently good.

Inherently worthy.

But that's not enough.

Acceptance needs to be fertilized with something else.

And that something else is the second chord in God's three part harmony.

The chord called "love."

As Jesus begins his walk toward the cross today, it's love that he entrusts to his friends.

It's love that he beckons his friends to embrace.

Not soft, sweet, sentimental love.

Not love limited to family, friends or insiders.

So far reaching is this second chord in God's three part harmony, that Jesus plants God's love right in the midst of enemy territory!

God's love is irrevocably planted in enemy love.

It makes sense that God's love is grounded in loving my enemy because, as Paul repeatedly reminds us, **we** are, all too often, the enemies of God.

"While we were still sinners," Paul reminds us, "God sent his only Son to die for us." Rom 5:8.

And he goes on:

"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

And he's still not done:

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Rom 5:6.

Jesus commands us to love our enemies — because God loves **us** — even when we are enemies of God!

It's the standard Dorothy Day came to discover when she realized that:

"I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least."

What happens when I apply that standard to my faith?

The ever widening circle of love, this second chord in God's three part harmony, not only includes our enemies, but it creates this sobering test:

My love of God is measured by my love of my enemy.

As soon as we begin to pick and choose whom we will love, we have departed from the way of Jesus.

As soon as we decide that some are deserving and others undeserving of our love, we cease following Jesus.

When those who claim Jesus as their Lord distinguish the saved from the damned, the elect from the doomed, the chosen from the rejected, we cease following Jesus.

Because Jesus, by hook or by crook, is determined to have every last one of us!

That's why he says: "When I am lifted up, I'll drag the **whole world** to myself." Jn 12:32.

Acceptance, fueled by love, sets the stage for the third chord in God's beautiful harmony: a new creation!

To be a faithful follower of Jesus, to be a bricklayer in God's kingdom, means we confront the violence of this world in a new way.

Not with the force of guns or bombs, but with soul force.

Like the founders of Black Lives Matter, who have taken on systemic, institutionalized racism in our nation, and demanded that these evils be not just confronted, but overthrown.

Like my friend Roy Bourgeois, a priest for some 40 years who dedicated his life to confronting the torture school run by our government in Georgia, known as The School of the Americas.

A school that trains Latin American soldiers how to decimate, torture and terrorize their own people.

Roy was thrown out of the priesthood in his old age.

But not because he opposed the horrors coming out of the torture school!

He was thrown out because he dared stand with Roman Catholic women whom God called to the priesthood.

This is the kind of witness to which Christ calls us.

Indeed, we are called to be soldiers.

But soldiers who follow one “who on the cross took violence upon himself in order to conquer and embrace the enemy.

The Lamb’s rule is legitimized not by the sword — but by his wounds.” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 300.

It’s why we can and must say “no” to violence.

“No” to massive expenditures on arms and their ingenious methods of destruction.

“No” to endless war and saber rattling.

As Christians who follow the slain lamb, it’s our duty to let the government know “that the Church is not afraid of any earthly power, ..., because more are for us than can ever be against us.

A vast throng no one can ever count, from every nation, tribe and language, stand before the throne, stand before the Lamb, robed in white, bearing palms in their hands.

We are even now, whenever we summon the courage to confront the powers of violence, joined with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, shouting together, “Victory to the Lamb!” Archbishop Desmond Tutu, paraphrased.

This is our call as followers of Jesus Christ.

God's three part harmony: accepting all, with love's embrace, creates a new heaven and a new earth.

There is so much to do.

At times, the challenge seems to be impossible.

Yet, we need not be discouraged.

For "the one who is seated on the throne says, 'See, I am making all things new!'" Rev. 21:6.

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