

Looking Down

Auntie Millie Kuniyoshi gets the gold star today because last week she reported back on her experiment with left-handed toothbrushing, which is what came out of our vestry retreat when our pal Mike Smith brought toothbrushes for us.

Start brushing, he said, and we grabbed our brushes with our right hands and did just that!

Then he told us to switch hands, then keep brushing.

We did, and just like Aunty Millie found out, that was hard!

The point Mike made at our retreat is that when it comes to our faith, we are mostly right handed brushers, meaning, we do what's comfortable, we do what's natural, we do what's human.

But Jesus calls us to a different way.

Which is why he's in hot water yet again with the religious Dudley Doorights and the Holy Harvey's of his day.

Right handed spirituality is all about the rules and being clear about who's in charge.

But here comes Jesus, insisting on what we have called left handed spirituality, a spirituality, a view of life, that arises out of compassion and mercy and love.

And Jesus says, in no uncertain terms, this is the heart of God's will for all of humanity.

Right handed spirituality, with its clear lines and its "us against them" mentality, that is a human creation, and whether we like to admit it or

not, we love right handed spirituality, precisely because its as easy as right handed tooth brushing!

Our love affair with our adorable, rational, logical rules, rules that always were and always will be on a collision course with God's way, it's all summed up in the last sentence of today's gospel; the one that reads,

"The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Now, that may not mean much to you, but if we translate that into today's language, it would say:

"And the Clinton people and the Trump people went out together and conspired..."

"And Whoopie Goldberg and Roseanne Barr went out and conspired..."

"And the Red Sox and the Yankees, Castro and Nixon, the Hatfields and the McCoys..."

You get the idea.

Jesus upsets EVERYONE!

And it doesn't stop today.

As time goes on, it's also the Romans and Peter, the whole power structure of Israel and his closest friends, they all turn on him, and if we think we have some kind of special exemption, well, we might want to think again...

There is something profoundly human in the ditty that says:

We are God's chosen few
All others will be damned

There's room enough in hell for you
We can't have heaven crammed.
-Jonathan Swift

That's religion talking.

But Christianity is not a religion.

Religion is defined as people searching for God.

Christianity is all about God searching for people.

When we search for God, **we** set up the rules, **we** determine the expectations, **we** are in control; it's all about right handed spirituality.

But when God searches for us, all of our rules and expectations and control fly out the window, because now we are grasped by left handed spirituality!

When we search for God, we are always looking up.

But when God searches for us, the focus is always on looking down.

When we look up, we see sun, moon and stars and imagine our own salvation.

But when we look down, we see the suffering of our fellow people, we see injustice and greed and racism and pain — and we realize that salvation can only be attained if we are willing to jump into the fray, by picking up the cross, by following, and not simply admiring, Jesus.

That need to follow Jesus into the grain fields of the world, to let go of our own best thinking and to give all that awaits us over to God, why, that need has never been greater than it is today.

The lines between races, classes, immigrants and citizens, men and women, those of different faiths, only seem to be getting more firmly drawn, deeper and darker and harder to cross.

This week alone offers too many examples.

Roseanne Barr returned to TV and was warmly welcomed by millions.

She has a long history of bigotry and racism, and just this week issued a tweet that compared a former Obama advisor, an African American woman, to an ape, to a terrorist.

Ms. Barr's response, after she was fired, was to claim that she issued the tweet while on the sleep medication Ambian.

The drug maker responded by noting that while the drug has many possible side effects, racism is not one of them...

And then we have Samantha Bee, making a shamefully disgusting comment about Ivanka Trump.

This nonsense isn't limited to comedians.

The New York Times devoted several pages to Franklin Graham's journey to California, where he's mobilizing evangelicals to turn that blue state red.

His high priorities include eliminating a woman's right to choose abortion and banning same sex marriage.

Ironically, Jesus says not a word about either of these issues, but he does say an awful lot about non-violence, and caring for the poor, and accepting the outcast — not a word of which crossed Mr. Graham's lips, at least as reported by the Times.

Looking down and toward — rather than up and away — this is the call of Jesus to each of us today.

A minister arrives late at night in Waikiki and decides to grab a bite at an all night diner.

While there, he overhears a group of prostitutes talking, one mentioning that the next day is her birthday.

When her companion asks rather snarkily: "what do you want, a party?", the woman retreats into her shell, whispering, "I've never had one in my whole life."

Well, the minister gets together with the diner's owner and decides to throw a party for her the next night.

A cake is baked and the cries of happy birthday leave the woman stunned.

As she is leaving, the minister asks if he can pray with her, and they do — and as she leaves, the diner owner gets mad at the minister.

"You never told me you are a preacher!

What kind of church do you belong to?!"

The minister replies: "To a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3 in the morning." Garland, 120, paraphrased.

Jesus commands us to look down, when we, with all our might, wish only to look up.

As one poet observes:

"While we look for him among priests, he is among sinners.

While we look for him among the free, he is a prisoner.

While we look for him in glory, he is bleeding on the cross.”
Id., quoting, G. O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, 74.

Taking a day to rest each week helps us move from our way of seeing and doing to God’s way.

All week we are consumed with consuming, and earning, with paying bills, and making our way through this dog eat dog world.

One day a week, we take a step out of our workaday world; and we enter “that sacred space where the goal is not to have, but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to conquer, but to live – in peace.” Id, quoting Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 1, paraphrased.

“Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things; on the Sabbath we become attuned to holiness in time.

Sabbath is a day when we share in that which is eternal in time, when we finally turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, when we turn our attention from the world of creation, to the creation of the world.” Id.

Sabbath gives us that chance each week to confront – in our very own selves – “the difficult truth of the cross, that we would rather kill Jesus than be transformed by his love.” *Feasting on the Word*, Yr. B, V. 3, 95.

+amen

