

Thanksgiving

I've mentioned this before, but some things bear repeating.

The most common phrase in all of scripture isn't "do this" or "don't do that" — the most common phrase in all of Scripture is:

"Don't be afraid!"

And today, that phrase finds its voice yet again in today's readings.

The prophet Joel rings out — NOT to humanity — but to the earth and the animal world:

"Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!

Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

The gospel lesson then carries this message forward to all of humanity; "don't worry!" — about the basic needs and wants of our every day human existence.

And here is the because: Because this world was created to be a world of life and abundance and plenty — that is the natural order of things — if only we are open to one another, if only we will share.....

How much these truths seem to fall upon deaf ears these days!

Fear and its cousins, hatred and distrust, seem to be on every street corner these days.

Whether it's Donald Trump falsely and shamelessly claiming that thousands of Jersey City Muslims celebrated the 9/11 attack or a governor insisting that even Syrian children are unwelcome in this country, today our faith reminds us that the way of fear is the way of death — but our faith invites us into life.

Don't be afraid!

You see, the church is not simply an older version of the Rotary Club — a gathering of likeminded folks intent on doing good — but instead of chips and dips indulges in bread and wine.

We do not eat bread and wine at this gathering, we eat the body and blood of the Lord: he becoming us as we become him.

We are not a gathering of people intent on trying to do something nice for folks in our community, nor is clean living at the top of our list.

We are the body and eyes and mouth and ears and feet and hands of Christ in this world that is dying for the kind touch of compassion, for the gentle breeze of forgiveness, for the assurance that life is not defined by a 9 to 5 job nor is its' purpose just a few years of pleasure before we die, but that we are all of us artists, craftsmen in that grand adventure that God herself began billions of years ago.

We are essential and irreplaceable players in this unfolding mystery that is the magnificent creation of God, on our way to a destiny that is beyond our present ability to even conceive

"Treated as impostors, yet we are true; as unknown, and yet we are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Don't be afraid!

This Thanksgiving Day is a stark reminder that there is much to be done.

We live in the richest nation on earth, in one of the wealthiest states in that nation.

Yet night after night, thousands of our sisters and brothers, some as young as a few days old, some in their 90's, sleep on sidewalks and tents and in over crowded bed bug infested shelters and the question that will not be silenced is what is the Body of Christ going to do about this assault on human dignity — which is also an assault on God?

The problem is huge, where can we begin?

We can begin with this:

Don't be afraid!

Don't be afraid as we gather ourselves together to talk with friends living on the streets.

Don't be afraid to say to all who will listen that we not only have rights to free speech and free religion, we also rights to decent, safe and sanitary housing.

Don't be afraid!

We can no more sit idly by in the face of this catastrophe than Christians in past years could sit idly by during the nuclear arms race or during the struggle for civil rights.

Housing for every person who wishes it is today's civil rights imperative.

Today is Thanksgiving.

May we all of us, in whatever way we can, join with our sister churches as we confront this moral imperative of our day — and don't be afraid!

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