

Fearless

We will be baptizing two members of Fr. Fan's Chinese congregation this morning.

Two men who come from Hong Kong, a city that is experiencing traumatic protest by a huge proportion of its population, a population seeking to maintain basic freedoms and basic rights that are under constant pressure of being rolled back.

Gratefully, the voice of the church in Hong Kong is loud and clear.

Anglicans and Methodists and Roman Catholics too have been on the front lines of this movement, urging the government to change course, and to push back against authoritarian powers seeking to intimidate and control. V. Yu, America, 7/8/19.

In our country we celebrate our independence this week.

We have seen better years, years when our better angels were at the forefront.

Angels that welcome the immigrant, rejoice in our diversity, and acknowledge that the bounty of this land is not ours for the grabbing, but ours for the sharing, conserving and nurturing.

Unlike any Fourth of July in our nation's history, this year's celebration saw tanks and other weapons of war, together with (reportedly reluctant) senior members of the military, paraded about in a display that no other US president ever saw fit to engage in.

Apparently this show is intended to announce that we are the strongest military nation on earth.

Who knew?

Add to the mix an Iran that is now breaching the nuclear deal in response for our nation doing the same over a year ago, a North Korea run by a despot engaged in a curious dance with our jet setting president and migrants locked in cages at our borders, while thousands from Central America continue their desperate trek north seeking to escape crushing poverty, gang violence and dictatorship.

Into this, our reality, steps Jesus.

And frankly, we couldn't ask for better news from the gospel today.

Today's gospel is all about why these two men are being baptized.

Today's gospel is all about why our obsession with apparent safety and security is a mirage.

Today's gospel shows why our fear of those who are different is so misplaced.

Jesus sends out 70, two by two.

The 70 represent all of humanity — and two by two reminds us of Noah, gathering life of every kind together - so we can imagine this motley crew of Jesus's advance team being made up of all kinds of folks, of every race, creed, color, sexual orientation and gender.

Jesus sends his advance team to announce what Jesus is all about; and it's not money or war or national borders.

Jesus is about opening our eyes to the world as it actually is, rather than the world we, with our ever present blinders, believe it to be.

It is said that "a person can choose only within the world they can see." Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 99.

Jesus sends out his 70 without money, extra clothes or even a walking stick, so that they may come to see that in vulnerability, in apparent weakness, is the gateway to God's abundance; it is the path to real peace and real power.

And the first eyes that are opened are the eyes of the 70 who are sent out.

I'm pretty sure when they left they thought Jesus was crazy and a lot of them were probably pretty frightened about what was awaiting them.

"What did he say about sheep among wolves?!"

But when they encounter the generosity of strangers, the peace of companionship, the warmth of being welcomed, the 70 come to see for themselves that openness to strangers, sharing, and venturing out, clothed in little more than trust, is the gateway to that which is Really Real; to the Kingdom of God.

The next set of eyes that are opened are those who welcome the 70.

They get a glimpse of what is coming in Jesus, and it isn't a warrior intent on kicking Rome out of an occupied Israel.

It is rather the gentle God that the prophet Isaiah speaks of this morning, this God who, like a mother, comforts her children.

It is in the letting go of anger, fear, resentments, anxiety, that opens the door to the God who is longing to fill us with good things.

But for people like us, who are obsessed with controlling people, places, and things, remaining in that space of letting go, of letting be, it's a really hard place to stay in.

The urgencies of life seem to conspire, minute by minute, to keep us in a place of anxiety or turmoil.

But that's why the 70, and that's why you and I, are sent out.

This really is a journey, not in miles, but in openness and practice and yes, failure, and trying yet again.

Just as our relationships provide a daily opportunity to stretch ourselves, so does this spiritual journey — and it's not for nothing!

Because every time we find ourselves in that place of release, even if just for a moment, we take a dip into the overwhelming peace and joy that comes with letting go.

And, as hard as it is to get to that place, every day we have a chance to try again.

Which brings us to the final person who sees something new this morning.

It is Jesus, seeing Satan falling from the sky!

Because who is Satan, but those powers of hate and fear and revenge?

And if we can confront those powers with compassion and kindness and gentleness, the fearsome beast is at long last disarmed, even one day becoming perhaps, our dear friend.

This is the true power of faith: it meets the undeniable evil in this world with compassion, kindness and gentleness.

Which means that our choice of heaven or hell (and it's always our choice!) is determined by where we feel at home.

What do we want?

What do we practice?

Because the difference between heaven and hell is as simple as this:

In hell, everyone gets 3 foot long chopsticks to eat with - and everyone is starving - because the chop sticks are too long to feed yourself.

In heaven, everyone gets 3 foot long chop sticks too, but everyone is fat and happy - because they feed each other!

Our faith is not about walking the straight and narrow and avoiding problems and therefore avoiding an angry God who expects perfection.

Our faith is about the life-long journey of learning how to release the things that we think we need (like feeding **ourselves**), so that we can have open hands, able to receive what we actually need (like learning to feed **one another**).

Mary Oliver's "instructions for living life" sound like something Jesus might tell the 70 this morning:

"Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it!"

That's what gets passed down from Jesus to the 70 and from the 70 to all of the succeeding generations that follow, as we too pass on these truths to those who follow us, to you who are being baptized this morning!

In your baptism, you are now part of this long and glorious assembly.

You are beginning a journey of learning how to let go of everything that ties you up in knots - and then sharing that "letting go" with anyone who crosses your path.

In that freedom, we become Jesus in the world - and we become One with the Divine in the world to come.

Which is another way of saying, "rejoice for your names are written in heaven!"

+amen