

Come Away

Who would've thought we'd ever hear a Mayor in Hawaii ask for a slow down in tourism, that seemingly untouchable golden goose of our economy?

Yet there was Mayor Victorino of Maui doing exactly that, as upwards of 30,000 people per day pour into these islands.

I was ruminating on our state's reopening, with the crush of people it's bringing, as I sat waiting to begin yet another funeral this past week.

The flood of people who have died since COVID, with delayed services for so many, not to mention the recent deaths of those near and dear us, brings the brevity of life front and center.

Just in the last few weeks, we've lost Margarita Suyat and our friend, the community activist and Methodist minister, Bob Nakata.

We've mourned the loss of Fr Gifford and Ken Fujishige.

What's the connection between a flood of tourists and a flood of funerals?

They each bring home the invitation that Jesus gives to the disciples this morning: come away and rest for awhile.

As we are in the midst of "returning to normal" — whatever that means — can we perhaps learn the lessons of the pandemic so that we don't simply return to what we did and who we were before March of 2020?

If the pandemic brought anything, it brought the gift of time spent alone.

The isolation, restrictions on gatherings and travel and work afforded many of us the chance to simply “be” for awhile.

An experience not often available in our supercharged lives with supercharged activities.

Come away and rest for awhile.

Can we create spaces in our daily lives going forward that allow for time alone – every day?

Can we turn off the TV?

Leave the office an hour early?

Or take an evening walk so that thoughts, emotions and feelings can be attended to?

Because it's in that “come away” place that we regain perspective.

It's the place that allows us to appreciate the gift, and the brevity, of life.

It's the place that allows us to nurture our higher selves.

And it's a place that helps us to be open to moments of grace.

The other week, during the Saturday breakfast, I was given a great gift that comes when we allow ourselves to “come away and rest for awhile.”

I was reluctant to share it, but someone said something that suggested maybe I should.

Perhaps you won't understand it.

I barely do myself.

As I stood at one of our white plastic tables, pouring water into paper cups, listening in on Cathy's conversation with Charlie, seeing the folks line up outside waiting for a hot meal, an awareness overtook me.

Inviting me to see that every choice in my life, all of my education, every failure and every success, my vocations as drug counselor, lawyer, judge and priest, all of it came together.

That somehow, in a moment of perfect clarity, my whole life was present, all at once, in the simple act of pouring water.

Like I said, I don't expect you to understand it.

I barely understand it myself.

And yet, it opened my eyes to what Jesus might mean when he says:

Come away and rest for awhile.

That we are not trapped in space and time, disjointed and uncertain where life leads.

But that at our core, we are connected to the Source of all that is: timeless, and without boundaries.

Perhaps this is what Paul is reaching for when he comes to see that the wall separating the Jews from everyone else is demolished in Christ.

This zealous protector of the Jewish faith, knocked on his backside and blinded, then sent off to Syria for years — is driven to “come away and rest for awhile” — and as he does, he comes to understand that truth isn’t found in rules and regulations, but in compassion and unity.

Which is what he’s announcing today to the people of Ephesus.

While we tend to categorize people into endless groups of “us and them,” for the Jewish people, there were only two groups in this world: the Jews and everyone else.

Yet today Paul comes to see that in Christ, every wall comes tumbling down.

He’s given the grace to see that the walls we build aren’t built by God.

We build them!

And that God’s deepest desire is that every wall that separates people from one another, even those walls that separate us from ourselves, are all destined to fall.

Walls built of race, creed, sexual orientation, class, and nation apparently mean nothing in God’s eyes.

The only question that matters is, do we care for one another?

We also build walls in our most intimate relationships, even within our very selves.

We build them between each other because of hurt feelings or prejudice or fear.

We build them within ourselves when childhood traumas are too great to bear, so walls get built around painful memories.

But as we age, unless we find the courage to peer behind these walls, unless we find the courage to eventually tear them down, we will find that the pain we thought we sealed away demands to be heard.

Leaking out in hurtful ways.

Harming those closest to us.

Harming our very own selves too.

Because in the end, we're not made to live with walls, so in the end, the walls fail us.

Yet, unless we take the time to "come away and rest awhile," we may never face these facts.

Even the apostles have a hard time.

Which is why Jesus takes them away.

Teaching them yet again how to tear down walls.

How are walls destroyed?

With compassion.

“Compassion” – meaning literally “to suffer with.”

It’s the point of what the theologians call the Incarnation.

God becomes a human being.

Emmanuel.

God with us.

God becomes like us.

Walking.

Sweating.

Thirsty and tired.

To show us that if the greatest wall of all can be dissolved, the wall between the divine and human, then surely our walls can be dissolved as well.

Compassion is the solvent.

And compassion comes from suffering.

Not self-imposed suffering for the sake of suffering.

But the suffering that is inevitable in every human life.

We live in a time when many pretend they can live without loss,

With billionaires who scoff at death as they compete with one another for flights into outer space.

Or freezing their heads in cryogenics.

Or manipulating genes to put off death forever.

There is a small but growing political philosophy that says that only the rich matter, everyone else is to serve them.

This thinking underlies the attacks on our social safety net, on food stamps and social security and medical care.

Bede Griffiths, who lived among the poor in India for decades, has a remedy for this kind of thinking, praying always, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

He's prays this prayer not out of guilt, but rather to:

"unite myself with all human beings from the beginning of the world who have experienced separation from from the eternal truth.

I realize that, as human beings, we are all separated from the source of our being.

We are wandering in a world of shadows, mistaking the outward appearance of people and things for reality.

But something is pressing us to reach out beyond the shadows, to face the reality, the truth, the inner and true meaning of our lives, and so to find the mystery which enfolds us." *Going Out of Oneself, Parabola*, 24-25, modified.

Isn't this our common condition?

We see the truth only dimly, as Paul says, as if through a glass.

We sense there is more to life than the obvious.

But if we are to enter into the deeper mysteries, we really do need to come away and rest for awhile.

In the resting, we might be surprised.

Because the child of rest, is insight.

And the child of insight, is joy!

+amen