

July 7, 2013 – Independence Day Propers

St. Peter's Church, Glenside, PA

First in a Series on *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*

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In the name of the One God, our Source and our Substance. Amen

Christian Celtic tradition, John Philip Newell reminds us, is deeply inspired by the mysticism of Saint John, the Beloved Disciple. The scripture tells us that John leaned against Jesus' breast at the Last Supper and, as Celtic tradition has it, John heard the heartbeat of God. This image became a symbol of the practice of listening: Listening deep within ourselves, listening deep within one another, listening within the body of the earth for the beat of the sacred presence.

This morning and for the next several Sundays, we will be exploring what it means to listen for God's heartbeat in our daily lives. These sermons will have in common the basic assumptions of the Celtic Christian tradition: that human beings, and in fact, everything that exists is intrinsically good and that the divine dwells within each of us and in all of creation.

This morning, since this is Independence Day weekend, we listen for God's yearning for unity, for restoration of the oneness of that which has been torn apart in God's creation.

We begin with a poem by the 13th Century Sufi Muslim poet, Rumi

Out beyond the ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in *that* grass,

the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*
doesn't make any sense.

- *The essential Rumi*, Translated by Coleman Barks with John Moyne

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

What Rumi was getting at and what Jesus consistently taught is that **We are one**. Friends and enemies, wrongdoers and rightdoers, we're all essentially one, we are all creatures of **The One, the Source of all life**. Each of us – every one of us – has the divine presence within us, whether we know it or not.

When we get beyond the distinction between wrongdoing and rightdoing, between "us" and "them", then it doesn't even make sense to talk about "each **other**" because there is no "**other**". God doesn't distinguish between good guys and bad guys. Everybody gets the same sunshine and the same rain.

Here is Eugene Peterson's translation of today's Gospel passage:

Jesus said, "You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.... Live generously and graciously toward all others, the way God lives toward you."

Matthew 5:43-48 in The Message by Eugene Peterson

That last phrase, “Live generously and graciously toward all others” is a much more accurate translation than most versions that have “Be perfect... as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Actually the parallel passage in Luke’s Gospel says it best: “Be **compassionate**, as your heavenly Father is compassionate.”

In the final weeks of his life, Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and visionary for peace, met in Asia with leaders of other religious traditions and other cultures. One of the last things he said to them was, “*My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we already are.*” **We are one.**

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton, page 308

John Philip Newell speaks of this reality that we are all one:

Our experiences of communion in life are glimpses into the original unity. They are a rediscovery of what we most truly are – one. Whether it is our experience of gazing into the vast infinity of night skies or looking deep into the eyes of one we love, it is the recognizing of a oneness we did not create but have been gifted with. It is the rediscovery of a harmony that precedes us, the remembering of a unity that is deep in the body of the universe. The best of our religious disciplines and ritual of communion reflect this. They do not create oneness, they help us **remember** our oneness.... They free us from... thinking that we are essentially separate. They liberate us from the delusions of our isolated individuality. In our sacrament of communion... when we share one bread and one cup together, we recite Jesus’ words, “Do this to remember me.” We do this to re-member, to bring back into relationship again, what has been forgotten, [what has been dis-membered] to reawaken within ourselves the way of oneness, the truth of oneness, the life of oneness.

Newell, John Philip, *A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth and the Human Soul*, pp 132f

The late Thomas Berry, noted cosmologist and cultural historian puts it like this, “Nothing is itself without everything else; nothing exists in isolation.” Or, in the homespun wisdom of my friend and guru Gerry Judd, “Everything is connected and nothing is not connected.”

Teilhard de Chardin prophetically anticipated the awareness of our essential

interconnectedness. He wrote from the trenches of the First World War, “All living beings are one being. What we do to one another as nations... is what we do to ourselves.”

There is a growing awareness of our global interrelatedness in economics, meteorology, cosmology and almost every discipline. We speak of the global village because we now have the technology for instant world-wide communication.

And yet we continue to suffer under the illusion that we can look out for the interests of one nation without taking into consideration the interests of other nations.

When will we learn that the golden rule is not just a pious admonition? It's like the law of gravity: we defy it to our own peril. What we do unto others we do unto ourselves. Because we are one. None of us is safe until all are safe. None of us is free as long as there are those who are enslaved. We are all impoverished until everyone has a just share of the riches of creation. As long as a third of the world's population has an inadequate food supply while many of the rest of us are overweight we are **all** in trouble. We are one.

The same principle applies to the way we deal with immigration issues as this morning's first lesson reminds us. “You shall also love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” And, unless you are a Native American, you were a stranger in this land, or your ancestors were. We need to recognize and affirm our oneness with the immigrants, the strangers, in our midst.

At Wednesday morning's Eucharist we were talking about this subject and Jesse Robson made a very simple and very profound observation. She said, “I don't like the word stranger. If we really welcomed the stranger there would be no strangers.”

Perhaps that is why the teachings of every major religion make it a point to emphasize the importance of welcoming the stranger.

I am aware that our country's immigration issues are highly complex and immigration reform, which nearly everybody seems to support in one way or another, is an extremely emotion-laden issue. I'm not about to proffer a solution. But the principal on which we are called to make decisions is not all that complicated: **You and I and the strangers in our midst are one.**

Out beyond the ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

Jesus said, Be compassionate, as your heavenly Father is compassionate.

Amen