

Readings:

John 6:24-35

Philippians 4:4-9

Reverence

Joyce Rupp reflects on a journal entry from Thomas Merton when she writes “we are always thinking that our life will truly be happy ‘when.’ We are not satisfied with what is currently our situation because we have it in our mind that our life won’t be happy until something else occurs: when I have one more thing I want, when I get rid of that personality flaw of mine, when I can finally have life as I have always dreamed it to be, when I am truly successful, when I learn to pray better, when I find the right person in my life, when, when, when...”

Waiting for the ‘when’ keeps me from appreciating what I now have. Longing for promises and dreaming dreams is not a harmful deed as long as the present moment is not overlooked, as long as gratitude rises for what is already here, as long as I do not base my happiness on what is still wanting. Thankfulness for what has already been given is the foundation for hoping for what is not yet.”¹

Reverence and gratitude seem to be the theme of my heart these days. It might be because thanksgiving is here, or it might be because I’ve been reading “An Altar in the World” by BB Taylor, or it might be because I am feeling content in life right now. But whatever it is the spirit seems to be taking me to new places, deep places, refreshing places of gratitude. And with that comes an awe and a reverence for God, creation and others.

This week in book group we had a beautiful conversation on reverence. If I thought we had the time I would bring up each of those gathered to share their stories of moments of awe and gratitude. We embraced BB Taylor’s notion “My life (deepens and) depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.”²

Mechtild of Magdeburg wrote “The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things.” I think this is what our scriptures are talking about

¹ Rupp, Joyce “out of the Ordinary” When. pg. 206

² Taylor, BB “An Altar in the World” pg. xxvii

when we are asked to rejoice and be thankful. And when the disciples are asked to consider where their life, their food, their salvation comes from. We as human beings are prone to not noticing. We are being called to pay attention to the holiness that surrounds us. BB Taylor wrote “The practice of paying attention really does take time. Most of us move so quickly that our surroundings become no more than the blurred scenery we fly past on our way to somewhere else. We pay attention to the speedometer, the wristwatch, the cell phone, the list of things to do, all of which feed our illusion that life is manageable. meanwhile, none of them meets the first criterion for reverence, which is to remind us that we are not gods. If anything, these devices sustain the illusion that we might yet be gods-if only we could find some way to do more faster. Reverence requires a certain pace. It requires a willingness to take detours, even side trips, which are not part of the original plan.”³

To live in gratitude and reverence is our human calling. One person in our book group discussion suggested that God is the energy that connects us. Like God is the space that holds us all together like a web of the spaces in between. It is when we start to notice our connectedness with the holy that we begin to discover all that we have. Paul Woodruff wrote “reverence is the recognition of something greater than the self- something that is beyond human creation or control, that transcends full human understanding...Reverence stands in awe of something - something that dwarfs the self, that allows human beings to sense the full extent of our limits - so that we can begin to see one another more reverently as well. An irreverent soul who is unable to feel awe in the presence of things higher than the self is also unable to feel respect in the presence of things it sees as lower than the self.”

Reverence for most of us comes fairly easily when we focus on creation. Muriel told us a story of being asked to sit in a 30 foot block of land for 1 hour 30 years ago. She still remembers that reverent experience because it changed her life. She was given the opportunity to stop and take notice. To see creation, to discover Holy mystery in the grass, and bugs and dirt and the.... I recalled my first reverence moments as a child when we would go out for weekends on the sailboat. My brother and I would beg to be able to sleep in the cot pit so that we could gaze at the night sky and then turn over and throw anything we could find off the edge of the boat to see the phosphorescence. I could spend hours gazing at the stars in the sky and in the sea. It brought me to moments of awe - and it still does today.

But we are challenged not only to be in awe and reverence of creation as in mountains and tree and oceans. But we are called by the holy of holies to be in reverence of one another. When we look into one another’s eyes we are called to see holy reverent creation. Reverence for other people presents for most of us more of a challenge, especially if those people impinge on our lives in some way. Taylor suggests one remedy for dealing with people who don’t live or do things the way we feel they ought to is to pay attention to them, even when they are in our way. For even just a moment - look at them as a human beings - as a child of God rather than an obstacle. She suggests that just as we will take moments to be in awe of creation, we might take

³ Taylor, BB pg. 24

moments to be in awe of others. The people walking down the street or the hallway, the people in the elevator or the bus, the grocery clerk or the waitress. What if every person we encountered we were to stop and take notice to remember that they too were going somewhere, and have something on their minds. Many of them are likely dealing with some things just like I am - maybe even worse. Taylor goes on to say “We are all breathing the same air, for this little time at least. Sometimes I say the Lord’s Prayer under my breath while I look from one of them to the next, but this is optional. Paying attention to them has already shifted my equilibrium. For all I know, one of them is practicing reverence on me.”⁴

On this day of thanksgiving let us be encouraged to practice reverence. Deep gratitude as we take notice of that which is beyond us. With Merton on this thanksgiving day “I am going to put aside my ‘when it happens’ and my ‘if only this could be’ and my ‘when things get better’ and my ‘as soon as I have this.’ I am going to harvest what I now have, gather all the many gifts that are already mine. I am going to observe what has been placed in the granary of my heart and marvel at the abundance.

I will stand before this heap of blessings and take a long, grateful look. I will say farewell to my ‘when’ and be thankful for what is.⁵

I want to end today with a poem by Joyce Rupp called

Gratitude for the Little Moments

Gratitude, yes. for all the big things that stand tall,
thick with abundance, joy, fruitfulness.
I cannot help but applaud their presence.

but deep thankfulness for the bite-sized pieces of my life?
I had not thought of them, those little snippets of time
so easily consumed in the hurry and blur of pretentious days,

the little moments, assumed and presumed,
slip quickly through the fingers of my busy life.

October gestures with a wrinkled brown hand,
beckons me wisely to consider
those fleeting moments of grace,
int things quickly passing:

a walk on a musky-wooded path,
a cup of coffee silently savored,

⁴ Taylor. pg. 28

⁵ Rupp, Joyce “Out of the Ordinary” When. pg. 206

a birdsong in the squeaky hours of dawn,
the gentle touch of a liver-spotted hand,
a loving letter from a grateful stranger,
a fading crescent moon in a royal blue sky.

I turn to gather finely layered remnants like these
in the come and go of my days,
and discover, with surprise, how quickly my inner room
is a harvest place of gold.

In thanksgiving, gratitude, reverence and awe I encourage you this day to stand before your heap of blessings and take a long, grateful look as you say farewell to your 'when' and be thankful for what is.⁶

No matter what the struggle or the joy may we live in reverence and gratitude this day.

Amen.

⁶ Rupp, Joyce "Out of the Ordinary" When. pg. 206