

All Saints Year A 2014

Eugene Peterson is a biblical scholar, writer of many books, and an imaginative believer. His chief work to which Mary and I from time to time refer is entitled simply, *The Message*. It is a translation and interpretation of the New Testament literature, true to the Greek texts, but using modern idiom with which we speak every day... All translations in fact are interpretations... which renders absurd the notion that we are to take scripture literally... because what would "literal" be other than interpretation in context of our own world... Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the great Romantic poet argued that it is the human imagination that animates and gives meaning to scripture... not the reverse... In other words... scripture is always being interpreted anew with the goal of discerning what God in these ancient words is speaking to us today. Coleridge would go so far as to say that the human imagination is one and the same with the Holy Spirit itself. The mystic tradition has always known this, and we would do well to open up to our imaginations when reading this literature of the Bible which we call holy.

So I'd like to read Peterson's take on the Gospel reading for today... fresh words for a timeless message:

Matthew 5:1-12 The Message

5¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

7 "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

8 "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

10 "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

11-12 "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

We'll only be reading from Matthew for three more weeks... Year A of the lectionary from which we've been reading since last Advent ends the next-to-last Sunday of this month... The first Sunday of Advent we'll begin reading principally from Mark's gospel... so as we say goodbye to Matthew let's look at the overarching theme of this writer who was writing in the late 70's- early 80's of the first century.

First of all, according to the poetics of Aristotle, we look to the prologue of Matthew, the set-up, as it were, to discern where this gospel is going... the set-up, which according to Aristotle, predisposes our interpretive lens. Matthew begins with a figurative genealogy which serves to connect the figure of Jesus to the biblical history of Israel. Matthew doesn't wish to propose that the Jesus movement is anything new... but that it is a continuation of the salvation history of Israel that began with Abraham, through Moses, the prophets up to the present day. Second, Matthew takes great pains to set the context within which the so-called good news of the Christ is told... You know the story well: Jesus is born in a barn during the time of Herod, during the time of Roman occupation... His livelihood is in danger... His family must flee to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous intentions... finally when the coast is clear, or somewhat less dangerous, he returns to Galilee to begin his ministry.

But he enters still a world of danger... His cousin John is beheaded... the Jewish leadership is threatened by his message... and of course we know where this all leads... In our gospel reading for today we find Jesus beginning his teaching on the mountain, just after his baptism and his trial with Satan in the desert... Satan, according to most scholars, in the context of the literary first century is a not so veiled allusion to the emperor and his oppressive occupation... Jesus then calls his disciples and begins to teach them... teach us.

So here's the thing according to Matthew: That Jesus is the archetype of a community of the committed faithful... a people who bear a vision of what the world is supposed to be like.... And these people, this community, are born into a world that is beset with evil that resists such a vision.... And that evil can be named: envy, greed, hate, corrupted power and violence.... That is the evil against which the gospel stands... the gospel of Matthew is about the profound and mysterious truth that giving one's life among others who have given their lives to God's vision of the world rightly ordered will abolish evil and its devices... that in living such a life one apprehends the ability to see the world as God sees it... true and beautiful and good... and for that we can only live in awe, and our only vocation becomes praise... and that dear friends is true freedom.

These so-called beatitudes describe, the evil in the world notwithstanding, is what this community of believers looks like... and this community is a microcosm of the world as God continues to create it... a community whose life and labor for the good ramifies, ramifies exponentially... bearing the fruits of mercy and compassion and justice to the human community entire.

So the church is a training ground for the committed... a community in which we are formed for the very work of salvation... salvation meaning shared abundance, well-being and dignity for all... Matthew makes it clear that this community of Jesus is radical, revolutionary... He makes it clear that God is about overturning the institutional order of things so that all people may live the good life... the good life... that is our

vocation... If you don't want to be a part of this revolution of the Good... then the Christian life, at least as Matthew describes it... is not for you.

So Allie... It is into this community of revolutionaries that we claim you this day... It is no small thing... today we honor all the faithful come before us and all that will follow.... Because it is our work of bringing love to the world, our work of, dare I say, raising the dead to new life... It is this work, this manner of life that brings true joy... and reclaims the world for God.... In your practice of the faith Allie, with help from your parents and godparents, and help from us.... May you grow into a person who gives hope to the hopeless... may you grow into a person who comforts the despairing... grow into a person who thirsts and hungers for justice... grow into a person of courage and gentleness... grow into a person who cares for her world deeply... that, dear one, is our legacy as the committed to God's vision in Christ....that is the way the world is truly made and you in it... a vision of who we are handed down from generation to generation... the beatitude of what it means to be fully human... May it be for us all... May it be for our world that waits... Allie, are you ready for the revolution? We are counting on you, just as we have counted on many... for this day you are a new symbol of hope, a friend of God, a world restorer... Are you ready?