

Easter V Year A 2014

I think I'm learning faster these days... perhaps it's just that I'm getting older, getting more experience... maybe I'm paying closer attention... maybe it's a choice to be open to what life has to teach us along the way.... Maybe I'm not learning any faster... maybe it just seems so. I want to share with you some of what I think I've learned about this life... maybe it will resonate with you.

First of all... I have learned that the future will never be what we think it will be... never.... If you think the future will unfold according to plan... we need to talk! We've learned that, right? And second.... A second thing I have learned is that what we fear most in our short time on this earth is not death... Death is not the thing that keeps us awake at night... the fear of death is not the thing that casts Hamlet into his dark night of the soul.... No, what we fear most is life itself... What we fear most is being truly alive... and being truly alive means that we must be open and honest to life's ambiguity... open and honest to life's improbable unfolding... to its danger... to its suffering... open to risk.... open to surprise.... Life is a process of improvisation... the future a mere contingency to what we improvise in each present moment... and by what is improvised upon us.... W. H. Auden calls this the way of "unlikeness"... a way upon which we experience phenomena never seen before... reality undreamed... We are forever on this journey called life entering new lands, new oceans.... Uncharted frontier... dangerous, beautiful... a journey upon which we must suffer, and a journey in which we find joy... there is not one without the other, as hard as we might pretend that things are otherwise.

In looking back over my life I have noticed a mantra that perhaps emerged for me when I was in grade school... though I didn't know how to articulate it then... but the words seem much more clear to me now... and those words are: "trust the process." Simple enough, they seem... but they have profound resonance with me.... To trust is to be open and vulnerable, and honest... one cannot trust if one is not honest... easier said than done, right? And then to see life as process... life being about the means of living, not the ends, which is to say again that whatever is next will be utterly unlike what we expect... In short, I'm saying to trust the means... and that means to put all our energy in the present moment... give ourselves fully to the matter at hand... Don't worry about the future... live now... open, vulnerable, honest.... Withhold from no one... keep no secrets... give yourself over to the here and now... trust the process.

This is what the Gospels I think are after, the writers and editors of John's gospel no exception... They are speculating as to the age-old question from Plato to Kierkegaard to the present day... of "How then shall we live"... What can we know, and what shall we do? For John Jesus is what we know and Jesus is how we live... what we do.... This passage that we just read, we hear at most funerals... as if this passage has something to do with the afterlife... as if the writer is pointing toward some utopian future... but we can't know the future... this passage is about how we live now, in the present moment... the only reality we know... and the writer proposes that we find our identity in how we live... In other words we know according to what we do... and to know ourselves is to know God... and in such knowledge is unbounded freedom.... So John's premise is this: To know Jesus is to know God... and the way to know Jesus is to live the way of Jesus... the way of Jesus being feeding, healing, befriending, forgiving... washing the feet of our neighbor... This is the way to be fully alive without fear even if we die trying...

We are sent as the Christ is sent to make many dwelling places for our brother and sister sojourners... The dwelling places of which Jesus speaks are not up there in the heavenly future... they are here and now on earth... and it is for us as the raised body of Christ to make dignified space for our brother, for our sister... to attend to the well being of our fellow travelers.

John is speaking to us of the secret of life itself... actually, no secret... not rocket science, he tells them... It's something we know and have known... something we certainly should know... that to live open, vulnerable and honest serving the well being of our neighbor is to live in God... and to live in God is to know perfect freedom... not a pie in the sky promise attainable only in the hereafter... but freedom to live into our full humanity without fear, and suffering notwithstanding, to live into joy.

These are words of wisdom for our journey... Trust the process... God is process, alive among us... Trust the Journey... trust the day trip... Give yourself to it... call on the improvising spirit within... pay attention on the way... there are signs... you will meet rare beasts, and there will be much to discover... Invite into your life those whom you meet on the road... make room for them... befriend unguardedly... Improvise goodness on the way.

This gift we call life is something for which to be incredibly grateful. What an awesome privilege to be invited for such a journey... if only for a day... a day of miracles and wonders... the privilege of living in the great improvisation, which is God's very life... despite the troubles, and the rigors of such a journey... I know that I am so grateful for this day's journey... grateful for those I meet along the way... grateful for the freedom God offers us, and the freedom we are called to engender. Jesus' prayer for us is that our joy be complete, and that prayer, that promise, brothers and sisters, is not for the future but... today... now.... How awesome is that?