

Proper 11 Year B

Three myths worth debunking... the first has to do with our families: people tell me all the time that there is something I need to know, and that is that my family is dysfunctional... really, I say... and of course there is no other kind, right?... and that awareness always comes as good news... and then another myth... and you know I mean myth with a little m... the other myth is the saying that God will never give us more than we can handle... that of course assumes that God is giving us things to make us miserable in the first place... and it also assumes that God has individual plans for each of us.... And we have the extended fantasy that God is orchestrating history towards some form of perfection... If that premise is true then God isn't very capable.... Violence still abounds... poverty is epidemic... dignity and well-being are compromised around the planet, even in the United States, the richest country in the world... if God has a plan it ain't working... or at least it hasn't been implemented yet.... Over the centuries organized Christianity has bought into the notion that believing in Jesus will beget a utopian future... that's what passes for salvation in our culture... and because that doesn't pan out... we project that onto the hereafter... that once we escape this vale of tears... our losses and our disappointments... we will live in bliss in heaven for eternity... that is what Freud called an illusion,... an illusion that leads to all manner of neuroses... an illusion that gives us permission to abdicate our responsibility in the here and now.... and I think Freud was right.... Now I'm not saying that there is not some form of consciousness after death... we'll just have to wait and see... but life after death is not what the gospels are talking about... Now the readership of Al. com would accuse me of being a heretic over such talk ... but it is clear to me that New Testament scripture has something decidedly different in mind when it comes to speaking of the so-called kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, and the idea of salvation.

So why then do we call these gospels good news? Let's look at what the writer of Mark has to say about this world we live in... and what he has to say about our role in it... and why he calls the life of the baptized... abundant... This gospel is in short a snapshot of our world, and how that world intersects with this so-called kingdom of God... So to review... this gospel is about the life of the baptized... we know that because the prologue is about the baptism of Jesus... Jesus the archetype of the true human... Jesus the archetype of a way of life up and against a corrupt and violent world... Mark is saying that the world we live in is a mess... and that the kingdom of God is not a place other than the world we

live in, but a part of it... that the kingdom of God is not a distant utopian future, something yet to be...but a present reality setting its roots amid the mess... You remember also that things happen in this gospel “Immediately.” Just as the weight of life is immediate, so too is the kingdom of God breaking into our world... So the kingdom of God doesn’t come to replace the mess... but it comes to participate in it... God does not exist to fix the mess, but God exists to participate in it.

The most important aspect of this gospel is that at the empty tomb the disciples are directed back to Galilee to encounter the risen Christ... At the empty tomb, a young man dressed in the white of baptism calls the disciples to return to the broken world, to literally bear resurrection life to the lost corners of humanity where there is shame and injustice. Resurrection is not an end... the end of the story... but it is a way of life... a way of life that brings possibility in the face of despair... a way of life amid the mess of the world... and to bear such life requires all of us. The excerpt from Mark’s gospel we heard read this morning appears between the story of John the Baptist’s gruesome murder, and the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples are described as harried... tired and hungry... It would be a good time to say, God won’t give us more than we can handle, but for the faithful... there is no time to rest, there is no time for relief... life goes on... and this life that goes on for us, followers of the way, is the life of love.

If God does have a plan... It is simply to love... to be about bringing justice and well-being and dignity to those who are like sheep without a shepherd, those harried by the weight of the world... It is the presence of love that engenders the kingdom of God... It is the presence of love against which no manner of evil can stand... Love wins... but love is not apart from the travail of this world, but lives in it; stands with courage and integrity... seeking the good, seeking restoration, bringing abundance where there is scarcity.

Our life as the baptized is to love our world... to work for equality and mercy and justice and peace... to stand with enlightened integrity amid the dark of life... That is what love does... Do not underestimate the exponential power of love; its ability to change things; its joyful process; its rejuvenitive practice... It is our life calling to be about the means of love, which is to be about the means of God... Improvising the good. In our burial right in the Episcopal Church we say, blessed are those who die in the Lord... for they rest from their labors... Brothers and sisters, that labor from which we rest is the labor of love... and we are called only to love until at last we rest... in the meantime there is no rest, only love... and that is plan enough I think... plan enough...