



Sunday, March 22, 2020
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

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San Jose, CA.

Centering Thought

Phillip's Birthday

I gave,
To a friend that I care for deeply,
Something that I loved.
It was only a small

Extremely shapely bone
That come from the ear
Of a whale.
It hurt a little

To give it away.
The next morning
I went out, as usual,
At sunrise

And there, in the harbor,
Was a swan.
I don't know
What he or she was doing there,

But the beauty of it
Was gift.
Do you see what I mean?
You give, and you are given.

Mary Oliver

Prayer

(Includes language from the hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
as well as from the poem, "Pandemic," by Lynn Ungar.)

Ever-present God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, be near to us this day. Guide us through the dark valleys of fear and uncertainty, of sickness and isolation, of want and insecurity. Lead us beside still waters. Let us find a quiet center, so we might reach out with our hearts, with our words, reach out with a compassion that moves, invisibly, where we cannot touch.

May the light of your Word show us the way. May the grace of your presence strengthen us. May the gift of your Spirit support us in our shared humanity. May your eternal wisdom flow through our spiritual and temporal leader, Bishop Carcaño, and all Leaders.

During this time of "social distancing," remind us we are bound by your Spirit. Bound together by a tie that binds. A tie that has never, can never, and will never be broken – your love, O God –

which never fails. Today, we promise this world your love. For better or for worse. In sickness and in health. So long as we all shall live.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. Be thou our guide while troubles last. And our eternal home. Amen.

Sacred Scripture

Genesis 1:1-2:4

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ***And God saw that the light was good***; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. ***And God saw that it was good***. Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. ***And God saw that it was good***. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. ***And God saw that it was good***. God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. God made the wild animals of the

earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. *And God saw that it was good.*

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.* And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens

Pastoral Reflection

Frederick Buechner was right when he said, “Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen.” Over the past couple of weeks, it seems the scales have tipped toward the “terrible” rather than the “beautiful,” particularly if you pay attention to the headlines. Take, for example, the following: “Dow Wipes Out Over 3 Years of Stock-Market Gains.” “US Economy Deteriorating Faster than Anticipated.” “Country in Coronavirus Lockdown.” “Dozens Violate Shelter-In-Place Order in San Jose.” “Can Trump Cancel the November Election?” (which, admittedly, may be either beautiful or terrible depending on your politics) to name a few. I also learned of terrible moments closer to home, like some folks in our congregation who have been laid off from work, of grocery stores with empty shelves, and of at least one woman who went to get tested for the virus and was turned away.

In my life, when the scale tips toward the terrible I try to pay closer attention to all that is good, beautiful, and true in this world. *Small graces that save me.* Like the gift of a good poem. And just the right amount of sage in a Tuscan Bean Soup. And to stare up at the heavens with wonder as I watch the dark clouds, with hints of pink, pass by overhead. And the squirrels charged with the

crime of breaking and entering into my neighbor's enclosed garden to steal a mid-day snack. And children running free, screaming with delight at the park after being cooped up in the house. And the consolation of a piece of music that will carry you through the day, like the one linked below did for me. And the first day of Spring this past Thursday, and that wonderful line from Pablo Neruda: You can pick all the flowers, but you can't stop the Spring. With each small grace, the scales begin to tip toward the beautiful again.

For God created this world and called it good.

This week, two dear friends and colleagues sent me this story.

When China was in the midst of their COVID-19 epidemic, Japan sent a huge ship of supplies to them—masks, medical equipment, supplies, etc. On each box of supplies was written a poem of 8 characters: “Mountains Rivers Different Lands / Wind Moon Same Sky.” It is a poem from the 14th century Buddhist monk who brought Buddhism from China to Japan. When China had weathered its epidemic, it sent a ship of supplies and equipment to Italy. On the boxes was written “Different waves, same sea.” That is, apparently, from an early Roman poem. If that can happen, much is possible.

“Yes,” I said to myself, “if that can happen, much *is* possible.”

For God created this world and called it good.

Tesoro High School Honor Student, Shaivi Shah, rallied her friends and classmates into helping her give away more than 250 low-cost ‘sanitation kits’ to homeless shelters around Los Angeles. Each kit contained hand sanitizer, lotion, antibacterial soap, and handmade reusable face masks to help homeless people stay safe. She has already raised more than \$13,000 in nine days. “They don’t have necessities right now that are crucial to remain clean and stay germ-free,” Shaivi told CNN. “It’s important for people to step in and do whatever they can, even if it helps just one person.”

Indeed, much is possible.

For God created this world and called it good.

When I need reminding of what is beautiful in this world, I remember this story. An elderly woman, named Martha, had always been a strong willed, very independent person. She had made it perfectly clear she never wanted to live in a nursing home. But the time came when she simply could no longer live alone, and she had no choice. Her friends worried, and her children feared. A few days after she was admitted to the nursing home, her pastor went to see her. He was surprised to find her so content, and he commented that she seemed to have adjusted to the move rather well. Relieved, the pastor thought to himself, “Oh thank you good Lord, this is going to be a pleasant visit.”

“Sit down right over there,” she said, pointing to a chair.

When you visit someone in a nursing home, as any of us know, they have earned the right to tell you where to sit, or to stand, or to get the hell out of their room for that matter.

The pastor sat.

“I want to tell you a story,” she said. “From where you are sitting, you should be able to see into the room across the hall – just as I can from my bed. Can you see it?”

The pastor leaned to the right a little. “I can,” he said.

“Last night, the woman in that bed – her name is Helen – fell out onto the floor. She was moaning and crying, but she was unable to talk. A very kind nurse’s aide came in. First, she put a blanket on Helen. Then, she felt her bones to see if anything was broken. She was okay but she was still frightened and moaning. I watched it all.” “Then,” Martha said, “the nurse’s aide laid right down next to her on the cold, hard tile floor. She laid beside her and held her a while. When Helen calmed down, the nurse’s aide said, “Well, now I think it’s okay for you to get back into bed.” And she very gently and carefully and lovingly helped her back into bed.

Indeed, much is possible.

Then Martha turned to her pastor and said: “You know, I think I’ll like it here.”

And he said... Nothing. Only smiled.

To his credit, he refrained from commentary. After a couple minutes, a brief prayer, and one last squeeze of the hand, he quietly stood up and walked out of the room and down the hall, weaving his way through wheelchairs, past the nurse’s station and dining room, past a dozen hand sanitizers mounted on walls, and through two sliding glass doors thankful for the small graces that were (and are) saving him.

“The beauty of it was gift.
Do you see what I mean?
You give, and you are given.”

It is true. Frederick Buechner was right when he said, “Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen.” But that is not all he said. Immediately after, he wrote: “Don’t be afraid. I (God) am with you.” Through compassion, love, and generosity of spirit we can...and will...and always...tip the scales toward what is beautiful again.

For God created this world and called it good...And still calls it good.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

It is a small grace one of the scriptures from the Lectionary on this Fourth Sunday in Lent is the 23rd Psalm, where the psalmist claims the abiding presence of God. I invite you to recite this Psalm as your Affirmation of Faith.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
 he leadeth me beside the still waters.
 He restoreth my soul:
 he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
 thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
 thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
 and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Amen.

The Blessing

Before you were born,
 God knew you.
 You are not an accident,
 although those will occur
 And you are not a mistake,
 although you and I will make them.
 You are fearfully and wonderfully made,
 Beloved and blessed by God.
 Go now out into the world and offer it your blessing.
 Go knowing no matter where you go,
 Or where I go,
 All the ground between and before us
 Is Holy Ground.
 Go now in Peace.
 Amen.

Sacred Music

I commend to you this small grace.
 My Shepherd Will Supply My Need, arr. Virgil Thomson-Holy Cross College Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igpC4MKro8g>