

Year B, Season of Creation (18th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 21)

September 29, 2021

The Reverend Dr. Brent Was

Let the people of God glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Good morning everyone! Blessings on another rainy day in Maine. I hope you are well, I really do, because there is a lot of tension in the air. I think Milissa's note in the eClare summed it up well. There is a lot of collective stress in our world, in our community, in our homes and lives. COVID exposures have happened in at least four schools on the peninsula, two of our kids here are on quarantine right now. The politics, of COVID and seemingly everything else remain taut with anticipation of conflict. I feel it. Most people I talk to feel it, a dis-ease in the world and even in our own skin.

Glorify the Lord, O priests and servants of the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

What do you do when you face conflict and stress? What do you do when your inner turmoil gets between you and the world around you, between you and the things that mean a lot to you, between you and the very things that help you, have helped you in hard times in the past? That's a real question. What do you do when things are upsetting to the point of distraction? _____

I used to run when life upset me too much, when looming decisions seemed overwhelming, when despair raised its ugly head. I row now (too much pounding out distress on concrete left me with a hip that is headed towards early retirement). It is, though, a lot harder to work out frustrations on the water than asphalt... it is so like water, but the endorphins soothe the savage beast and calluses building up and tearing off keep me in the present moment.

What I find that it does, that physical exertion, is that it puts life in perspective. When you are breathing hard, catching a breath after a sprint, a hill on your bike, a flight of stairs, whatever you find strenuous, you know, nothing is more important than that next breath.

There's some perspective on what is truly important. Breathing.

Physical exertion is one of innumerable ways to gain perspective. Creating something, a painting, a photograph, a cake, music, a garden... The creative act puts things in perspective. Fasting is a time honored way to shake up our perspective on life. Prayer does, too. And Silence, encountering what some call the Sacrament of the Present Moment, because right now is all that there is. Right now is where you are, right here, right now. You might be thinking about somewhere else, well certainly not during a sermon, but other times, but you are right here, right now and only right here, right now. This is where God is, not in the past, in a memory of God, not in the future, a wish or fantasy, but right now. Now there is some perspective.

Glorify the Lord, O spirits and souls of the righteous, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

In this Season of Creation, I went back and re-read Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical letter *Ladato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. There was an adult ed on that here some years ago. You should read it. Every faithful Christian should read it. You certainly may not agree with all of the Vatican's analysis or prescriptions, fair enough, but what I find brilliant about the letter is how it puts it *all* in perspective... all the personalities of God, our own nature, the infinite complexity of the creation and the interdependent web of life that we and all created things are imbedded.

Have you seen the image, it is usually on t-shirts or college dorm room posters, it is the Milky Way, and then off on one of the swirling arms, way away from the center, is a little arrow and the words, "You are here"? That's some perspective. Big, big perspective.

Pope Francis wrote, "The Creator can say to each one of us: 'before I formed you in the womb, I knew you' (*Jer* 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason 'each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.'" Necessary... You, a mote of atoms, in a small town, on the shores of a fast warming body of water, on a minor planet, around a mid-sized, middle-aged star, on a remote arm of an unremarkable spiral galaxy, you are necessary to God. Before you were a

dream in your parents' hearts, you were a beloved reality in God's.

Ahh! The will to love, the will to life! Now there is some perspective. In one way or another, the will to life we find everywhere in our own lives is the same force that sent that little goat Sweet William, remember him, the 2 foot buck who hurled himself over a 6 foot fence because his sweeties were on the other side? It is the same. The same force worked on our second best rooster ever, Sir Timothy Runs-a-lot. Timothy after the grass, hay is largely Timothy and Clover; Runs-a-lot because that bird spent all day running back and forth across a large farmyard – measuring his feet, it was a chicken marathon every day, keeping an eye on things, making sure not an egg was laid that wasn't fertile. The love of life propelled Sweet William through the air and Sir Tim across the farm yard, it is the same force that launched the dandelion seeds towards that pristine lawn, the salmon on its journey up the falls, that sends the river to the sea. The Wobbly poet Utah Phillips speaks of that, the path of the river to the sea, it is the path of least resistance in the most cosmically sound sense of the world, because remember, it is the “path of least resistance that makes the river run crooked.”

You that are holy and humble of heart, glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

According to Francis (Pope, not Saint), the creation narrative suggests that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself... The harmony between the creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations... it is significant that the harmony which St Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. St. Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation of every creature, St. Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence.”

“...universal reconciliation of every creature...”, “...returned to the state of original innocence.” Now that is some perspective. That puts our hurts and wants and resentments in their proper place. Not unimportant, having agency, feeling heard, being valued, are not

unimportant, but in the scheme of things, most things we bump into in our lives are important, but not *that* important. Not as important as love that binds, relationships that nurture, friends that comfort, the interdependent web of existence in which we occupy an infinitesimal node, which is of desperate importance to God and is also a fleeting blip on the face of Deep Eternity.

Emily Dickinson says it well,

The Only News I know
Is Bulletins all Day
From Immortality.

The Only Shows I see—
Tomorrow and Today—
Perchance Eternity—

The Only One I meet
Is God-The Only Street—
Existence—This traversed

If Other News there be—
Or Admirabler Show—
I'll tell it You—

Perspective.

So how do we respond to all of that, the blessings of the creation, the little space carved out of existence that you fill, the gift of life that we have been given that outweighs everything else? How do we respond in a way that gives justice to this gift?

Let us glorify the Lord: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

“Praise him and highly exalt him forever.” Praise and thanksgiving. Gratitude. Gratitude for the gift of life bequeathed to us by pure grace alone. Praise in the practical application of gratitude. How do we express that? Well there is straight up Praise, expressing the thanksgiving of our hearts and minds and lips, like the Song of Praise, the

Gloria in excelsis we start each Sunday with. “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God’s people on earth...” When we pray prayers, or sing songs, we take those words, the Word behind them, we take them into ourselves, but then we release them back to the world like a prize trout. It’ll do a lot more good out there than in my frying pan. We praise God when we say grace before a meal. (We *really* praise God when we pause to give thanks *after* we are sated). We praise God when we make something beautiful, something helpful, something useful. Or, as Jesus taught, we praise God in what we do for the least of these, for what we do for them, we do for God. Or in the reasonably undramatic lives of most of us around here, where we don’t have many extremes, not in most of our lives, at least not most of the time, we praise God by returning the kindness and forgiveness of God to those other creatures we share this existence with. Kindness and forgiveness. There is no greater gift that we have been given, and there is no greater gift that we can give. Now that is some perspective you can take to the bank.

So let’s put a word of praise on each of our lips. Open up your Book of Common Prayer to page 90, it is the *Doxology* of the *Song of the Three Young Men* that has carried us through this Season of Creation.

Let us glorify the Lord: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.
In the firmament of his power, glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever. AMEN.