

“Bless to Me the Small Things”

Psalm 148

Luke 12: 22 – 31

September 24, 2017

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I have the fortune of being a part of a Disciples clergy women’s group that meets almost weekly. This past week as we met, we were talking about the lyrics to the song ‘Awake My Soul’. Now you might think that because we’re clergy or because all of us are here in church now, I’m referring to a hymn or spiritual. But, no, not the case. Anyone here familiar with the band Mumford and Sons? They kind of go along with this Celtic theme in that they are a British band, but I say, ‘kind of’ because they’re a band that’s been popular for the last few years. It was the Mumford and Sons hit song ‘Awake My Soul’ that we were reflecting on. And while we were talking about the song, one of my friends in the group told us about taking her dog for a walk.

A pretty ordinary event, right, taking your dog for a walk? Especially for those of us dog owners who try to fit a walk in sometime during the day between other things in our schedules that may be more pressing. But this was no ordinary event, this was pretty extraordinary as she tells it. She and her husband had decided when they stepped out the door that they were going to just allow their dog all the time he wanted; they were going to walk with him instead of he being tugged along by them. Their dog is old, probably in his last year, maybe his last months. He’s almost deaf, he’s 90% blind. But oh can he smell! Nothing wrong with his nose! So the other day they were walking their loyal hound and he was in heaven! He was content to stay right in one area, his nose in the grass, sniffing and snorting, inhaling with tail wagging, shaking his entire body. They had not seen him that happy in a long time. She said that it was as if he was with his nose soaking in the gift of each blade of grass.

Soaking in the gift of each blade of grass made me think of a quote from the Talmud, the book of Jewish teachings, “Every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers, ‘grow, grow’”.

The dog owner, on the other hand, was thinking about the before mentioned Mumford and Sons song, Awake My Soul, and exclaimed, “Boy, that dog was awake!”

Awake my soul! To be fully awake! Jonathan Swift was the dean of St. Patrick’s cathedral in Dublin Ireland during the 17th Century. ‘Awake my soul’, Swift put it another way saying, ‘May you live each day of your life.’ May you live, may you be fully alive and aware and awake each day of your life.

It seems to me that a lot of what our Christian journey and our time together each week is about is just that; helping ourselves and helping each other awaken to the presence of the Holy in our lives; to be awake and aware of the awesomeness of love that is of God and is God that surrounds us and is a part of us and connects us each of our days.

To be able to count our blessings, but not just the extra special circumstances; but as with ancient Celtic spirituality; all of our life. Bless to me God's presence....

Last week we focused on the Celtic understanding of God through Christ present with us throughout our day; in our waking and in our sleeping, Christ beside us, Christ within us. And today, we're about 'soul awakening' by reflecting on the small, ordinary, day to day, often passed by, taken for granted things in our lives: 'blessed to me.....'

God's creation, the natural world, was a central part of Celtic Christianity. Possibly because of the influence of the druids in the area and adoption of much of their practices, possibly because they were island countries primarily rural, often rugged land, they were farmers, woodsmen, fishermen. They were connected to the land. And blessings often came in the form of the sunrise in the morning, earth overturned and ready for planting, waves on the shore, the mountain heather, a meadowlark, or, as on the bulletin cover, a field dotted with yellow dandelions.

Does this sound familiar? We know of another, don't we, who took the small and ordinary stuff of life and used it, wove it into words and parables to help others to see with the heart, to understand God more fully. Of course I'm referring to Jesus who said,

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.
The kingdom of God is like a pearl.
There was once a sower, who sowed seeds on a path...

And from today's reading in Luke, 'look, just look at the crows who don't plant or harvest yet God takes care of them. And stop for a moment to look at the lilies. Notice how they grow. They don't worry about what they wear. But I say to you that even Solomon in all his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these.'

In these verses, Jesus is putting our anxiety in check, our worries to rest. And if we expand our text to include what comes before and what comes after, there's a whole lot more. Right before this reading, there's an argument about family inheritance, 'teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!' In typical Jesus fashion, he tells them a parable about a rich man whose land produced abundantly, who pulled down all of his barns and built larger ones to store the grain, who had enough to live the good life for years and years but suddenly he died. And Jesus said, "You can't take it with you! No one's ever seen a hearse pulling' a U hall!' Actually, Jesus said, 'so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.'

A life 'rich toward God'. Hmm...could that be something like one's soul being awake to God, that there is a relationship there that opens one to compassion and sharing and caring, not just storing and hoarding? So our text for today, look at the crows, notice the lilies, comes after this story about how to spend one's days and is followed by the words, 'do not worry, for it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom', on earth as it is in heaven, we pray. All of chapter 12 is about putting our life in perspective, noticing the small things, realizing the treasures in life are those kingdom glimpses, those holy moments when we allow ourselves to experience the holy in

the ordinary. To not live in the worries of tomorrow but to hold on to the gratitude of this moment, to be thankful for the gift of even and especially those small, seemingly ordinary things in our lives, THAT is what is important.

And as I said last week – and it bears repeating – trying to be more fully aware of the presence of God in our lives, the living Christ within and among us, the gifts of God’s creation – trying to be more aware and awake is not navel gazing, is not shutting out the pains of the world, is not just living in the moment and not concerned about our brothers and sisters who are suffering and our earth that is hurting. On the contrary. Jonathan Smith, who wrote, “Live all the days of your life?” He was heavily involved in the social justice struggle for the Irish people who were being oppressed in those days. ‘Live all the days of your life’ did not mean to live a self-centered, me centered existence, but to live as fully as God intended you to live all the days of your life. To be awake to the blessings of God, not in monetary riches but in the small everyday things of life, so much so that one reaches out in love to share with others.

Life is hard. We have our own struggles. To live means to experience loss and grief, to fall every now and then. Life is hard; we turn on the TV these days and see our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico under water, our brothers and sisters in Mexico under rubble. We hear bullying rhetoric of war and what it means to be patriotic. We wonder about our health care and insurance, we wonder if there will be jobs tomorrow. Life is hard. To recognize our blessings, to truly live each day of our life, does not mean to deny or ignore how hard life can be. Rather, it’s to ground us, is our lifeline and hope in the midst of our struggles for ourselves, in the midst of our social justice struggles for others. I can only move forward if I remind myself of the great loving God that is there as a light in our darkness. To open myself up to encounter God gives me strength for the journey. Not doing so leads me to despair.

Awake my soul. Just pay attention.

We heard words from poet Mary Oliver at the beginning of our time together. I end with another poem by her as well:

“It doesn’t have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don’t try
to make them elaborate, this isn’t
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.”

Bless to me, bless to me, all that is life. May it be so.

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Intro before Worship:

Today we find ourselves in the second of a five-week worship series on blessings. Instead of focusing on how we often interpret blessings in our lives as something favored or good or special or lucky, we're using the lens of Celtic Christianity. Celtic Christians of the time around 200 A.D. to 1400 A.D. or so, those who lived in the rural lands of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, a land that, except for the sea, looks in many places similar to Central Kentucky. They were a people very much tied to the seasons, to the rising and setting of the sun, to the tides of the moon, to the earth, creation. In Celtic spirituality, 'blessings' can be understood as the very stuff of life, that *all of life is a gift – a blessing*.

Last week we reflected on the blessing of God's presence throughout our day.

Today we center on the blessings of the small things of life.