

June 25, 2005 Progressive Pathways Fellowship Jim Hensley

FIRST READER

Christ the Lord be with you.
And also with you.

A reading from the book of Psalms.

Sing a new song

Let there be praise in the assembly of the faithful.

Let the nation rejoice in its maker,

And the children of Zion delight in their sovereign.

Let them praise the sacred name with dancing,

Sing out with timbrel and lyre.

For the one that loves us looks with favor on the holy ones and there is much honor for the humble.

Glory be to the one who loves us, the one who leads us and the one who guides us, as always before so now and evermore. Let all the fellowship acclaim.

Amen.

SECOND READER

A reading from the book of Asclepius

No, I cannot hope to name the maker of all majesty, the father and master of everything, with a single name, even a name composed of many names; god is nameless or rather she is all-named since he is one and all, so that one must call all things by her name or call him by the names of everything. The only and the all, completely full of the fertility of both sexes and ever pregnant with her own will, always begets whatever she wished to procreate. His will is all goodness. For this divinity the same goodness that is in all things came to be naturally so that all might be as they are and were, so that to all things to come hereafter they might provide the power to be of themselves.

Glory be to the one who loves us, the one who leads us and the one who guides us, as always before so now and evermore. Let all the fellowship acclaim.

Amen.

THIRD READER

Christ our Lord be with you
And also with you.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 10. verses 9 through 16. The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Holy One, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What the Holy Name has cleansed, you must not call common or unclean." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Glory be to the one who loves us, the one who leads us and the one who guides us, as always before so now and evermore. Let all the fellowship acclaim.
Amen.

SERMON

Beginnings are fragile. It's a time when things must be done delicately. Or maybe not. Maybe the beginning is the time for shock and awe. How do you tell the difference? What's the best thing to do?

Here's my suggestion. It's part of the reason I'm glad we're all here this morning. It's part of my reason for supporting yet another little church. Are you ready? Ask yourself this..do you want to conquer or do you want to nurture? Do you want to ponder or do you want to shake things up? That's what you have to decide.

Peter wanted to ponder. How was it possible to be a good Jew and a good Christian at the same time? But the Holy One wanted him to shake things up. Asclepius wanted to shake things up with a radical new understanding of the divine. But he ends up being a healer and a nurturer. In Greek mythology he's the father of medicine and the first divine doctor.

Conquers don't have time for questions. They know they're right. They know they're the ones to straighten things out. They're here to set you on the right path and clean up this mess. Once in a while we need to run into a few conquers. In academia and in some religions there is a saying, "Error has no rights." If something is broken it needs to be fixed or eliminated. It's for the best.

Now what about letting something grow? Nothing can be forced to grow but there's lots of things a person can do to help or encourage growth. Watching something grow takes patience and commitment and curiosity. What do you reckon this is going to grow into? A weed? A flower? What am I learning? Should I leave well enough alone and check back later?

The thing the Peter did and the thing that Asclepius did that made it all work out OK in the end is listen to the voice of the Holy One and do what they were called to do not necessarily what they thought was best. That had a plan but when they went to the Divine with that plan there were a few modifications.

All of us have taken care of growing things and all of us have been the conquering hero. It's inside of us. This fellowship is going to need both. We're going to need heroes to stand against injustice, coercion and indifference. We're going to need people to speak the truth in love boldly, with resolute hearts and commitment. We're going to have to be bold as a fellowship to speak up for ourselves and others when they are persecuted even when the persecution is self-loathing, doubt and internalized homophobia. There is a community that we're all a part of that has an agenda of its own and communities of faith that are on a mission of self-aggrandizement and intimidation. We have to stand up and be counted when the time comes.

We're also going to need nurturers. We're going to need people with tender hearts and patience. So many people have been harmed by aggressive, toxic religion. There's so much work to be done while our fellowship grows. The responsibility for growth isn't just with the clergy or the council or the planning group. It's everyone's responsibility. In the very near future we're probably going to discover differences in ideas and opinions. Some members of this fellowship may choose to be Christians and some may not. People will begin to step forward to nurture other ministries. We may have a neo-pagan group or a Gnostic service in the future. Another group may choose to meet on Friday evening for Jewish prayers. We may be hearing from the Hebrew scriptures, the Christian scriptures, the Vedas and Black Elk as we go and develop new expressions of the things we discover on our different paths.

All of us will be honored, all of us will have a chance to take up the responsibility we're called to. All of us will have a chance to grow and to be heroes. That's what it means to have liberal hearts and open minds. We will continue to seek out the many, varied pathways into the presence of the Divine.