

Walk and not grow Weary

Rob Gieselmann, Epiphany 5B, 2015

Preaching the Gospel, says the Apostle Paul, affords one rights. *Don't muzzle the ox while he is treading*, Paul quotes the Law. Meaning – the ox should be allowed to eat grain while he works in the fields. The preacher should be paid while she preaches, but, says Paul, I – as a preacher – have not taken a single dime from you – and I don't plan to. Instead, I want to become all things to all people – so I might win everybody.

The other Apostles, Paul notes somewhat sardonically, take full advantage – They – Peter included take Christian women around with them. Now – I have to pause and comment that I hope Paul means wives – they take wives around with them on their trips – Regardless, I'm not sure what Paul's point is – Does he mean – they take *Christian women* to keep them company? Do the laundry? Cook the meals? Peter had wife. You just heard Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law – He healed her; so she got up; and she waited on them.

More than one minister has commented that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law so she could do what women do: feed the men. *Really?* Jesus healed her so he could eat supper? A woman's place is in the home – and all that.

******When you stand outside on a very dark night, and you look up into the heavens – you see not only Andromeda and Venus, but thousands upon thousands of stars and galaxies; you see the filmy sheath of white that is the Milky Way. You watch an asteroid streak across the sky. And you know – when you look into the face of all that eternity – there is a God. Celestial phenomena add dimension to life, infuse meaning – somehow. They tell you, you are not a mistake, but you are here for a reason, and it is good. Isaiah asks, *Do you not know? Have you not heard?* It is the Lord who made the stars. ...If not he who calls each star by name? And as I contemplate the illuminated heavens, I have to ask, what would life feel like without stars? ...Without Saturn or Mars? ...The Milky Way, the moon, and the asteroids streaking across the nighttime sky. Just the earth and its sun, and if you were to go outside and look up into that sky, all you would see is black. Pitch black. Would life have dimension, then? Would you know then there is a God? Maybe, but once again, I find this incredible connection between the created order and its soul, its life force, God: the Great I am.

*Robert Beck claims that Mark's Gospel is a polemic against the Jewish caste system. In those days, Jews were categorized as holy or unholy, as clean or unclean. The priests were holy-plus other religious leaders – while menstruating women were unclean. A tax collector, ...and the leper had to shout *Unclean! Unclean!* ...when he came near.

This caste system created a false sense of – either security, in the case of the priest whose heart was far from God, or condemnation – the person who was categorically unclean yet whose heart was tender. At one point, Jesus debunked the entire caste system: It isn't the vessel that is either clean or unclean, but the soul. What is the color of your soul?

The modern world is equally replete with its systems of judgment and comparison. India and its caste system – England – if Downton Abbey is to be believed – and even today, a hundred years later, your accent belies your status. *All men are created equal*, claims our Declaration of Independence – that is, unless you are a slave, in which case our Constitution says you're worth 3/5 of a person, or are a woman and not entitled to vote.

Ferguson, Missouri has taught us nothing if not the lesson that justice is not always color-blind. When I first practiced law in Tennessee, one of the best lawyers in town was denied membership in the local country club because he was Jewish. I can tell you from personal experience that Republicans in Marin are marginalized. Personally I like the bumper sticker that says, God is not a Republican, *nor* a Democrat.

Jesus didn't heal Peter's mother-in-law because he was hungry. The only people Jesus marginalized were the people who marginalized others. Jesus healed the woman because she was sick. In Christ there is no East nor West; In Him no South or North. Caste systems – explicit or implicit – have no place in God's kingdom or in the church. Jesus is egalitarian – *Respect the dignity of every human being*, you promised as part of your baptismal vow. So let me say, *do not* make the same *mistake* the Corinthians made – they thought more highly of themselves than they ought.

Now - what *do* we know about Peter's mother-in-law? Not a whole bunch. Except that her daughter was married to the first Pope. The rest is conjecture. But don't you think she must have been pretty sick – Or else she would have been caring for her honored guests – I don't think this was the common cold.

**In her essay, On Being Ill, Virginia Woolf wrote, English ... express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, [but] has no [word] for the [pain of sickness]...no [words to] describe ... pain to a doctor?*

I have been in severe pain, plus, I have watched others endure severe pain – unspeakable pain – indescribable pain – both physical and emotional. There are no words that convey the experience of pain. There are no words that tell the story of Peter's mother-in-law, and her suffering. Clean, unclean; holy, unholy... A woman... Sick. And Jesus noticed...Because it is the color of the soul that counts – Not the status. ...Do you not know, have you not heard? The stars God named in the sky – are seen by everybody alike.

So on this day – perhaps you endure a pain nobody understands, one that you cannot describe, one unseen. It is to you that Isaiah wrote. It is to you that Isaiah points to stars. For you are not alone, nor ignored. *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Those that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not grow weary, walk and not faint.*