

God Is the Gravity and Christ is the Glue

Proper 22 Year A

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19 *Caeli enarrant* ; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46

In August I had the great fortune to attend an academic conference in Montréal. I had only been there once before so I was looking forward to getting a little bit better oriented in that fascinating place. The first night I made plans with a colleague from Wisconsin to have dinner. I had a recommendation from a Canadian friend for a great little out of the way bistro so I made a reservation. It turned out to be sort of a trial to get there. My plane was on time but my colleague got stuck in Detroit and so I had to keep calling the restaurant and changing the arrival time. Once we both were in striking distance we had to deal with cab drivers from different ends of the city but we managed to converge, walk to the corner to buy wine and finally get seated. As we walked in we chattered about how lovely the place was. And especially how nice that there was another room behind the bar.

We had a great dinner—the food was great, the service was great, our French was passable, and we got caught up on what was happening to us in our personal lives—both of us dealing with parents with Alzheimers—and with professional things. We were quite surprised when dinner was done to discover the place was empty but for us. Then, on the way out we both exclaimed—as we noticed that the “other room” was really just a mirror—just an illusion.

In the Bible, as in life, sometimes it seems like things are just a matter of illusions— smoke and mirrors— or nowadays virtual realities—until we are never quite certain what is real and what is not. Our first lesson today is the delivery of the ten commandments to Moses and through him to the people of the exile. It all takes place in the context of what theologians call theophany—the appearance of God—the real, literal, presence of God. At the end of the passage it refers to thunder, lightening, the sound of a trumpet—in this case a deafening roar—and the mountain smoking. All signs that God is present.

I don't know what it is like for you when God is present. We all experience it a little differently I suppose. But then again, we all have this experience of trumpets and fire and smoke. Smoke and clouds and inner doubt signal the presence of God. The smoke and clouds are the signs; it is inside, in your soul, where the doubt lies. That is the place where you have to do battle with your own barriers to God's presence—there, in your soul, it is just you and God. These moments seem to last a long time, a lifetime in a few minutes it can be, nothing seeming to happen or everything happening at once. It is not unlike a loved one's illness when there is nothing for you to do but wait and fear and the fear and trembling consume what is left of you other, of course, than the love at your center—into this tough spot comes, with clarity, *God*. That my friends is theophany. God is present in your soul.

Paul says he is forgetting the past so he can strain forward to what lies ahead. Straining forward to what lies ahead. As though what lies ahead does not already lie ahead and yet you have to strain for it. But of course, you do—have to strain for it—if you want to have full awareness of the presence of God in your own soul. It is hard work my friends to be with God. You have to let go of everything that keeps you from the presence of God. You have to go back into those moments of consuming love you have to stay in those moments because there, in that loving, is such an extreme of spirit. You pour your spirit out, for the other. You deny your own self in order to pour your spirit out, for the other. This is love. This is God's love. This is God's love working in us. This is the love we have for those we marry. This is the love for those to whom we give birth and those who have given us birth. This is the love we have for those who have come within the embrace of our own spirit. It is this spirit which is the prize of the heavenly call of God, it is this spirit to the exclusion of all else that is the power of God that we know through Christ.

And all of creation knows this love. “The heavens declare the glory of God” says the psalm. God is the gravity and Christ is the glue; it is they who hold all of creation together with the love they create and own and share. Walking in Christ's love is being one with the sinews of creation. Walking in Christ's love is walking from eternity to eternity in the handiwork of the firmament.

Jesus said: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. We produce the fruit of the kingdom when we walk in love. When we do not walk in love we walk in another dimension, one of our own creation where love does not rule. These alternate dimensions are like virtual realities, like that other room that only seems to be there. We can choose this door to the other reality, or we can choose to dwell in God's dimension of love, the one where there is no hunger or thirst, where there only is love. And the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows God's handiwork.

How many of us have lived in this difficult Gospel parable? How many of us have rejected the master's servants? How many of our lives lie dashed on the true cornerstone? All of us, and each of us, of course. For that is the story of the Gospel of our God. That all of our sins have been forgiven. In the kingdom of God that is the true reality. The

toil of human effort, my friends, pales in the shadow of the presence of God. The toil of human effort is either the walk we walk in God's love, or it is distraction that keeps us from hearing the loud trumpet that brings the word of God.

So where does that leave us? Dig deep my fellow Christians, this is not an easy path we have chosen. And yet, it is the gateway to the kingdom of God. And it also is the will of God, given eternally for eternity for me and for you. All of us have been there in the smoke and the clouds. All of us have been in the desperate loving moments of life. And all of us have been there when God came for God's due, and we did in God's servants instead. And yet God's love for us is so powerful that even that has already been forgiven. All God asks of us is that we should remember now, and always, to walk in the eternity of love that God has prepared for us. God's love is the gravity that is the force that holds all of creation together. Christ Jesus, given to us, is the glue, whose love for us bind us together with Him and with God and with each other. And the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows God's handiwork. *Amen.*