

Pentecost 10, Proper 12
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

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Break-through

Life is complicated.

I learned a song when I was young that goes like this:

*This world is not my home, I'm justa passin' through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

An anonymous work arranged by Albert Brumley in 1937, it may have roots in the African American spiritual tradition. It expresses a kind of pie in the sky by and by goal of the Christian life, discourages involvement in this earthly life's concerns, and encourages personal piety over communal action for justice. It married well to the missionary life my parents led: carry the Word of God to those who have not heard, and let the chips fall where they may. After all, doesn't the book of Revelation say it's all going to burn up anyway?

Now, I say in my parents' defense, that they never quite bought it completely. Whereas my father would regularly dispose of medically sensitive materials by stopping along the road from Santo Domingo to Quito and "throw them off an Ande," as he would say, and we would regularly burn our trash—plastics and all, he worked tirelessly when the Ecuadorian government was surveying Indian land, to keep swindlers and other less-than-scrupulous people from trying to steal Indian land. He brought medical attention and a store to the community--he did what he thought he could do. He did try his hand at grafting citrus and seeing if he could develop a way to raise pigs profitably without letting them roam free, tearing up the land, (both efforts of which yielded underwhelming results.)

Maybe it was that somewhat mixed message, along with some of my own experience, that led me to conclude that that little song I learned was only a tiny sliver of what the Christian life is all about. You see, it was in the mountains of Ecuador that I learned what contemplative prayer was, experiences that awoke in me an awareness of a spiritual reality that later I learned had a name: sacrament. On this latest trip to Ecuador my son Landon and I went back to those high, wet, windswept lands. I found that my soul rooted itself once again in the ground, found its footing, and was filled with unspeakable joy.

It's hard to say I wasn't in heaven, even though my boots were firmly planted on the earth. Life is more than what it seems. Heaven is not just "later," but just out of sight, all around us, and occasionally it breaks in on us.

Jesus had a way of making heaven break in on us. It is reflected in the phrase, "the Kingdom of God has come near." In today's Gospel, for instance, Jesus shows that, whereas what we might call the economy of earth, controls goods and services, withholding them from some and bestowing more than enough on others, heaven is a place of overwhelming abundance. When the people flock to make him an earthly king, an effort at domesticating and harnessing

this new, wonderful thing just revealed to them, that provided for them what Rome promised and did not deliver, he slips away because they've missed the point. Heaven is bigger than just food for the hungry. It is where all had enough.

When the disciples find themselves struggling against contrary winds, Jesus walks over to them on the water—and they are instantly at their port of call. Heaven is bigger than the wind, the waves and the distance from home. It IS home for all.

Heaven, it would seem, is full of wild, untamable and yet loving and beneficent wonders. We should stand in awe, we should be filled with unspeakable joy, and for the love of God, we should be working to help people to notice and be changed when heaven breaks through.

That is a daunting task. I saw a headline this week that quoted an Ohio lawmaker as saying that the only way to save our democracy if the Democrats win will be civil war. Now, it must be acknowledged that he apologized afterwards, but the damage is done. The fact that this lawmaker is a Republican is entirely beside the point. It would be just as narrow-minded, just as blind to heaven if Nancy Pelosi had said it, and apologized. The fact that this lawmaker is a Republican is entirely beside the point. It would be just as narrow-minded, just as blind to heaven if Nancy Pelosi had said it. No, my good people, no! Where is the awe, the unspeakable joy? Heaven is bigger than that. Earth should be as well!

It's just one example of small-minded, earthbound thinking; either-or, them or us, mine or not-mine, zero sum economics; the awe, the unspeakable joy are shadows of heaven that every human being is capable of. We know better, and yet we go to war to avoid doing better. It feels like 5000 hungry people far away from Safeway. It feels like contrary winds across miles of water.

What does it take? It takes offering our lunch to Jesus. Yes, it seems impossibly little in the face of the need, but in heaven's economy, it is all that is required. Give of yourselves. Be willing to offer up what seems essential. Giving to God is not giving away, but giving with. Your gift is a recognition that your hunger is bound up with everyone's hunger and your food is bound up with everyone's food. Heaven is bigger than just your need.

It takes welcoming Jesus into our boat. We know the world is changing. The future could be full of new forms of justice and peace, the chance to reach for those changes we so long for, yet at the same time, the future demands that we relinquish parts of the past (some deeply cherished) that do not fit in the emerging world. I believe that the divisions in our society fall largely along that fuzzy line between the promise and threat of the future. The winds of change out at sea, or the safety of a known harbor. It may seem crazy that in the midst of our struggles, we look for Jesus walking on the water towards us, but in heaven's world, it's to be expected. Where Jesus is, there is home port, there is peace, there is home. Wherever we end up, it will be OK. We will find that we have not lost everything, only the unnecessary, and we have gained the only things truly important.

Instead of making Jesus king, it takes being Jesus. We offer up what is entrusted to us, trusting that Heaven will provide. We venture onto unknown waters to bring people to peace, and we

stand in awe, wonder and unspeakable joy as heaven breaks through.