

Pentecost 21, Proper 25
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

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Rev. Paul Moore

Engaged

You've all heard it before; you've all probably pulled this one before. "Honey, why are there pieces of Mommy's nice ceramic vase all over the floor?"

"Well, it broke!"

Yes, it broke, all by itself. It decided the world was too cruel and jumped to its own demise with no help from clumsy children's fingers. In the language that my parents studied in Ecuador there is a suffix you can put on a verb that indicates that you didn't have anything to do with it. Not, "bojie, which would imply person involvement, but, "bojinue." "It broke." And I'm not involved. We hear politicians do it all the time. It's the other party's fault. I'm not involved, or at least, I'm not responsible. The evil is located elsewhere.

Our Christian faith holds a rather different position on the nature of evil. Last week we baptized a couple of children. One would probably object to being called a child, since he is not very far away from that wonderful stage in life of teenager, but in the baptismal rite there are questions posed to candidates who can answer for themselves, the parents and godparents. The three renunciations read:

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Richard Rohr wrote a weekly series of meditations on the nature of evil, and he reminds us that in the early church and medieval times, evil was understood to exist on three levels:

- The cosmic level of Satan and spiritual forces of evil,
- The "system" of society, that is, "the world," as we live in it as a community of human beings with culture, class, laws and inequities,
- The individual's participation in evil.

You see that each of the renunciations addresses a level of evil.

The acceptances that follow the same line.

- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? (the personal relationship with Christ)
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? (commitment to a way of relating based on God's character)
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? (embracing God's cosmic system)

What is most important about his comments is that most of what is really "evil" doesn't happen on the level of the individual. I might tell the truth as I best understand it, but I share in a system that propagates lies. For example, our sisters and brothers in Resurrección are really laying low right now. They fear violence not just from immigration officials, but white supremacy movements. We say that skin color shouldn't matter, yet our society is structured in such a way that these groups are flourishing. We say we learned our lesson in the Civil War, but these groups are stockpiling ammunition for the next civil war that they plan to start.

Until released from this earthly pilgrimage we are in constant tension. We are caught in a system that is evil, even as we strive against it. Therefore, the last promise in the Prayer Book's Baptismal Covenant reads, *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?* And the answer is just as telling: *I will with God's help.*

Jesus walks down that path in the Gospel lesson today. Again, the Jewish leadership wants to trip him up. They had a tense cease-fire going with the Roman occupying forces. Those forces were corrupt and violent, but challenging the cease-fire might just make it worse. And so, much like so much of Christianity today, they focused on individual piety. Did you fulfill the law? If you did, you're a good person, and you're not responsible for the suffering in the world. If you didn't you will suffer—and we'll watch from over here. "Bojinue." I'm not involved.

“Any challenging of the system could get Rome upset, so, Jesus, watch your step. To take you down a notch, we'll ask you a trick question. Which is the greatest commandment?”

Of 613 of them, to single out one would be to imply that the others weren't quite so important or significant, and then they could nail him for being a rabblrouser, the cause of the trouble; in him, not them, over there, not in here. "Bojinue." I'm not involved.

In his response, Jesus bests them at their own game. The summary of the Law he gives is not original to him. It's a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5, and the substance of it is alluded to in many other places in the Old Testament. Even the line he adds, "Love your neighbor as yourself," comes from the book of Leviticus. He knows the Law.

Then, he throws them a question they can't answer. It's significant, because it has to do with who he is. The "Son of David," is made to sound greater than David, something the Jewish understanding couldn't grasp. The son is never greater than the father, especially the father of the Jewish nation, David, yet, there it is, in the book of the Psalms.

Now that his authority as a biblical scholar is established, it leaves them with that second half of the commandment. *Love your neighbor as yourself.* If you care for your neighbor as you care for yourself, there are certain things you won't do and certain things you will do. There are things you won't let happen and things you will make sure happen. I went to court last year with a member of Resurrección because we know that when people

gather in the courtroom in support of someone the judge is more likely to be merciful. In loving your neighbor you recognize that your life and their life are bound up together, and what happens to one happens to all.

In this way of thinking, there is no "bojinue," "I'm not involved."

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

*MEDITATION XVII
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions
John Donne*

The polluted air that anyone is forced to breathe is the same air that I breathe. The injustice one suffers is suffered by all. The evil in the world is the concern of all.

But there is hope. Because of Jesus' resurrection,

*We believe that God is healing and restoring the world,
And that we are recipients of and participants in that healing and restoration.*

In the end, healing and restoration will have the final word. Therefore, we are not "bojinue." We are engaged, involved, inspired and empowered.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, though it certainly includes it, our struggle against evil is so much more than just the struggle against personal sins. We are engaged with the powers of heaven and God's people around the world, waging peace and justice in divine love against the powers that would corrupt and destroy. In the face of all the evil we see in the world, we take up the arms of love, truth and justice, and we struggle, knowing that in the end, God will win.

So, what's your part of it? You probably guessed that this is really a stewardship sermon. Your part of it is all you do to live the Kingdom in the midst of the chaos and evil of the world. It's all you give toward making that happen, your time, your talents and your treasure. Two areas are in special focus today.

Voting has begun and will culminate in just 9 days. All elections are important, but perhaps this one is especially so, given how divided we are as a country. The Presiding Bishop's office has asked us to consider this Sunday "Voting Sunday," and we will be using the Prayers of the People his office has provided. But consider these quotes.

Bayard Rustin: "If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society. If we desire a society that is democratic, then democracy must become a means as well as an end."

And this passage from Isaiah 58:6-10:

Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

And then, Pledge Ingathering Sunday is November 8. You have already received a letter from your Senior Warden and myself. You have received a pledge card (or if you haven't, we'd be happy to provide you with one.) We are in this together. Consider these words from St. Paul about a gift the Corinthian church gathered for the poor Christians in Judea:

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

And then, later he writes,

Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."

Where is your heart? Listen to your heart and then follow where it leads. Is it sidestepping the issues? Is it "bojinue," I'm not involved? Or is it engaged, involved, inspired and empowered? Where is your heart?