Thanksgiving Day Year B

November 26, 2015 All Saints’ Church

Joel 2:21-27 First Letter of Timothy 2:1-7

Psalm 126 Gospel of Matthew 6:25-33

Let us Pray: Thank you dear Lord, for your presence among us, in our hearts and in the Eucharist. Thank you for our safety and security. Thank you for our loved ones, family and friends. Thank you for All Saints’, and the gift we have in serving you.

Last Saturday I drove up to the North Country with Fr. Luis, the new rector of St. Andrews, Hopkinton. We were meeting with the Bishop, as he supports new rectors and newly ordained priests in the diocese with a retreat of study and reflection every other month. Fr. Luis has just moved here from California and he was excited that his spouse had just been hired by Starbucks.

“Oh, that’s great,” I said.

“Well, yes, except it’s not a great time to start, as more cups of coffee get thrown at the workers during the season of Thanksgiving and Christmas.”

“Are you kidding me? Customers throw cups of coffee at the servers?”

“Oh yes, just more during this festive time of the year.”

“Why, do you think, Luis?”

“I don’t know, but there is a sermon lurking in there somewhere.”

So I have been thinking about it all week.

The messages we hear of this season are about Light, Love, Peace, Joy and Giving Thanks. Yet, within these wonderful sentiments, many people feel more exposed by the Light, than invited within it.

Often we are not feeling these loving and powerful emotions. We “should”; we try to” appear to be” and yet in the face of the joy, we can become lonely; we are anxious, tied-up-in-knots, maybe guilty, maybe feeling deprived or angry.

We all know these emotions; yet at this Season of Thanksgiving and Love, a time that emphasizes how happy we all are, people spiral, and the inner “demon” voices can become very negative: Who am I? I am nothing, insignificant, a loser, a misfit, a friendless idiot. Overwhelmed by the voices, these distorted messages win the contest of what is defining reality. We can begin to spiral, and sometimes, tragically so, make an idol of our fear of insignificance. In other words, so absorbed by our “supposed” insignificance, we make an idol of our fear and worship it, like any idol that can appear God-like.

I have had a lot of interactions with students who make an idol of their fear of insignificance. So worried that they will not meet the grade, or live up to all the gifts and chances they have been given to live the “good life” they become like pressured time bombs, ticking away because they think they don’t deserve what they have been given. With such anxiety, they begin to lead a double –life, appearing “together” and yet just under the surface they are lost, confused, afraid and discouraged. They need a release. In my experience, more teenagers “experiment” with drugs and alcohol, not to be daring, but to heal a insatiable hunger and to escape from its gnawing power.

I remember these students, particularly during this time, as all of us are bombarded with “Black Friday” advertisements that are like a plague: In the midst of much vulnerability, here’s a chance at a momentary feel good moment: consume and don’t worry if it’s only a momentary “quick fix.” Unfortunately, the aftermath will only make us sink further into the malaise of our despair and guilt and uneasiness, leading us deeper into our fear of our insignificance and our lack of power.

How do we break this cycle?

I think it can begin by realizing that we are the coffee throwers. We may not know the extreme frustrations of someone who throws coffee at unsuspecting servers, yet we can identify with the fear that we just don’t meet the grade.

This is when I want to take a page from the Twelve Step Programs: we grow best in the shadow lands, a term Richard Rohr refers to as the “dark grace.” When we let ourselves name the fear of our insignificance, it no longer has its grip. We are freed to search for truth, humility and generosity of spirit, and to lean on the Love of Jesus. And, most importantly, we can accept our messiness as glory.

Jesus loved the prodigal son, **in his return**. If we read the parable closely, we can see that this wayward son was motivated because he was hungry, starving in fact. He devised the scheme of asking his father for forgiveness, but it wasn’t sincere; he needed to survive and would do anything to put food in his mouth, even if it was only feed that his father fed his livestock. We are the Prodigal Son as well. And yet, when the father sees his son in the distance, he runs to him, and cuts him off as his son tries to apologize with his formulaic gesture. “My son has returned; we will celebrate!”

Even though the son was motivated by fear and hunger, and not awareness or contrition, it doesn’t matter. God always meets us at the Mercy Seat. So let’s stop worrying about our worthiness.

“Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing (all the trappings we used to dress up or dress down our own ego). Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil or spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

When we are in our darkness, remember the Light. The Light of Giving Thanks, the Light of Christ. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Let us give thanks that the Light of Christ, not matter our intentions, resides in all of us.

AMEN.

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