

Aug. 4, 2019
Mark 4:26-34
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
Mary E. Baard

***Pilgrim Path:
Internal and External Horizons***

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Good morning. It's good to see you all. I'm glad to be returning to a community that values kindness and humility, while seeking justice. These are three spiritual practices that require deep commitment and practice, practice, practice.

We are living in a time where the physical battlefield has moved to our neighborhoods - as we saw at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, and a bar in Dayton, Ohio – just this weekend.

Vilification of the Other is moral quicksand. Bullying, name-calling, and rage are antithetical to everything Jesus stood for. They say there are enough guns in this country for every person to have one. I don't own a gun, but I'd like someone who has mine to turn it in. So, let us commit again to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

I chose today's reading because, as Jesus often does, he suggests that if we want to learn about God, we would be wise to pay closer attention to the natural world. In this case he suggests we watch the way of seeds, which miraculously begin with something so small and seemingly inert and then come to life. It is the very miracle we delight in during these brief weeks of summer here in Maine.

SERMON

For me, the last three months have gone very quickly. In May, Ron and I attended conferences and events here in Maine, in New York, and Arizona.

The month of June was a sabbath for me - I rested, and then I rested some more – taking a nap most every afternoon. A couple of Sundays, I walked to our outdoor labyrinth for my morning worship.

For the first part of July, we went on a contemplative retreat to Newfoundland. I told you before I left that one of my goals was to learn how to say Newfoundland. They say Newfoundland. To help you remember – understand, Newfoundland. In a couple of weeks, I'll talk about our journey to Newfoundland.

Today I want to share a reflection and a poem from David Whyte, who was the keynote speaker at the national meeting of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education we attended in Arizona.

David Whyte is an English poet who lives in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. His mother was from Ireland, his father from Yorkshire. With a background in Biology, David describes his poetry and philosophy as based on the “conversational nature of reality.” (Wikipedia). He has spent the last twenty-five years sharing his poetry

and consulting and lecturing on conversational leadership models for businesses. He is a gifted public speaker and a great storyteller.

One theme in his talk was the interaction between our internal horizon – going deeper - and our external horizon – lifting our heads up. Ironically, it is when we go deeper into the life of the Spirit that we can go further into the world around us.

Whyte asked if we have noticed that the most common body position today is of a person hunched over their cell phone. I noticed it everywhere we went. In one of the restaurants we were in on our journeys, I watched a family with two elementary age boys sitting at a table near us. There was no conversation among them. The mother and father each had cell phones and each boy had a tablet. During their meal each spent time on their own electronic device. I felt sad.

With the focus only about a foot from our face we are caught in limbo. We're neither moving deeper to our internal horizon -into the life of the Spirit- nor are we lifting our heads up to the external horizon and engaging the world around us. Not that we don't learn a lot and even extend our horizons through electronic communications, but they have a limited capacity and, even limit our capacity, to engage the conversational reality right around us. We humans are social animals and we need to help our young people learn how to be social.

In introducing one of his poems, David Whyte told a story about a Irish monk who said that the best sound is hearing a bell calling you to prayer AND the best sound is

hearing a blackbird calling you into the world. They are both the best sound and represent the dialectic between the internal and external horizons. The bell calls us to the internal and the blackbird calls us to the external. Life is only lived fully by responding to both.

This story inspired Whyte to write a poem entitled *The Bell and the Blackbird*. Now, when David shares a poem, he recites it twice. The first time through he repeats phrases, so that the words echo in your heart and mind. Then he pauses to allow it to settle. Then he recites it straight through. I'll follow his example.

The Bell and the Blackbird

*The sound
of a bell
still reverberating,*

*or a blackbird
calling
from a corner
of a field.*

*Asking you
to wake
into this life
or inviting you
deeper
to one that waits.*

*Either way
takes courage
either way wants you
to be nothing
but that self that
is not self at all,*

*wants you to walk
to the place
where you find
you already know
how to give
every last thing
away.*

*The approach
that is also
the meeting itself,
without any
meeting
at all.*

*That radiance
you have always
carried with you
as you walk
both alone
and completely
accompanied
in friendship
by every corner
of the world
crying
Allelujah.*

In this meal may we know again

*That radiance
you have always
carried with you
as you walk
both alone
and completely
accompanied
in friendship
by every corner
of the world
crying
Allelujah.*

I am grateful for sabbatical time to respond both to the sound of the bell and the blackbird. Thank you for this time. I wish our culture was more respectful of everyone's need for time like this.

Breaking bread together in communion is a bell and blackbird experience. We are called to move deeper within – to tune our spirits to God's Spirit. And as we share gifts of the earth – the wheat and the grape – and the presence of one another we are called to move deeper into the world around us.