

The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 17, 2019
Church of the Holy Cross
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

All Shall Be Well

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

I was reminded of these words from Julian of Norwich when I read the Gospel. Julian is a Christian Mystic and theologian. She wrote *Revelations of Divine Love* after falling ill in 1373 at age 30, and having a series of visions of the Passion of Christ, and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Her words, “*All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*” have been one of the cornerstones of my faith. It speaks to my belief and to my trust in God. Because when you are in the middle of life—that hectic, unpredictable thing we wake up to face every morning. It takes a lot to say, in the face of anxiety, aversity, and hard work to survive and thrive that “All shall be well.” While I know that I, like most of you enjoy an easier day-to-day set of life circumstances than a lot of the world—I do not need to walk miles for water, or wonder if I will have shelter when I sleep. Still, some days my life journey can feel like I am careening toward Hell in a handbasket, and that does not feel at all well.

Julian was trying to convey a message extrapolated from a vision. How do you explain the unexplainable? How do you comprehend the incomprehensible? You don’t. We have limitations, and the best we can do is to describe things beyond our comprehension in terms of things we know. Julian had a vision. I imagine wracked with fever, this vision lasted a while—like seeing a private movie screening where you are an audience of one. Then trying to describe what you saw—there are not enough words. In the end, the best way to capture the meaning of the vision was simple. “All shall be well.”

How God reveals Godself to us is also difficult to describe, as God is incomprehensible to our tiny human brains. Yet, as God’s creation we need to be in relationship with our creator, and therefore we need to put God into terms we can understand and relate to.

Today in the first lesson I saw a familiar pattern. Jeremiah speaks of being blessed through our trust in the Lord. I think in this reading we are the tree, God the creator and source of all life is the water, Jesus is the root system that connects the tree to the water, and the Holy Spirit is revealed in the fruits or gifts born by the tree. And as Jeremiah says at the end, “*I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.*” It sounds to me, that in a relationship with God, what we do, matters.

To me the message here is that we need to plant ourselves near the source of life, and put down roots that connect us to the source, and to each other. Interestingly enough it was discovered not long ago that trees are connected to each other, and in fact the largest single living organism on the planet is the Pando tree in Fishlake National Forest in south-central Utah—its root system is estimated to be 80,000 years old. The tree is connected by its roots,* in the same way we are connected to each other through Jesus—connected to the source of all life.

Jeremiah also warns us that those who trust in mortals and make flesh their strength. They shall be cursed, like a desert shrub, not knowing when relief comes, being parched in the wilderness. The question for us is, will we choose God’s way, which promises life? Or will you choose to go your own way, which promises death?

The Gospel today is a familiar one, but we are hearing Luke’s version and not Matthew’s. In Matthew Jesus gives His sermon on a mount and there are nine “Blesseds.” But in Luke, we are on a level place

and there are four “Blesseds” and four woes or warnings. To unpack this a little, I read a commentary by Ronald Allen, a professor at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Allen explained that a “level place” often refers to places of corpses, disgrace, idolatry, suffering, misery, hunger, annihilation, and mourning. The prophets foresaw God renewing the level places. So, when Jesus stood in a broken level place, he was renewing that world, and giving hope by revealing the Realm of God. A realm where we are connected to the source of all life through Jesus. And, the fruit that we bear through the actions we take, is what blesses us. We are blessed when we bless each other. Do we have level places in our world today? We need only read the news, because disgrace, idolatry, suffering, misery, hunger, annihilation, and mourning are most certainly part of our world. Our world is similar to the world in the time of Jesus.

Here comes my favorite question, “Now what do we do?” How do we bear fruit in our time? How do we manifest the values and practices of the Realm in the midst of the “level places” in our lives?

To answer that for myself, I looked at the “Woes” section of the Gospel. Woe to me if I am rich and keep it to myself, I have my reward in the here and now. Woe to me if I have food security yet let my neighbor go hungry. Woe to me if I am all about a good time and do not have empathy and compassion on those who suffer. Woe to me if my haughty image of being right, proper, and held in high esteem is more important than being seen with the poor, the tax collectors, sinners, orphans and immigrants. Prior to this passage in Luke, Jesus was criticized for breaking some rules of the sabbath, but he pointed out that the spirit of the law had been lost. Then, Jesus calls the twelve, and then gives this sermon on a place of level ground.

The people had gathered to be healed, and Jesus healed them. They needed hope, and Jesus gave them hope. Jesus was telling the people that we are all connected, that what we do in the world matters. Essentially, we need to love God, and love our neighbors. And Jesus warned them, just as we heard Jeremiah warn the people of his day, “*Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD.*” Jesus tells them “*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*” In many ways, Jesus is preaching a Stewardship sermon.

If there is one thing that I admire about the Jewish way of life, it is that when Jewish law is followed, it calls people to have a vested interest in the welfare of their neighbors. Helping every person in the community thrive brings up the whole community. Everyone benefits when those who enjoy much success and good fortune, help those less fortunate, to succeed and thrive.

We are blessed when we focus on the Realm of God, and not on earthly things. We are blessed when we plant ourselves close to the source of life, and connect ourselves to the source by rooting ourselves in the teachings of Jesus. We are blessed when what we do in this world, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bears fruit and blesses others.

Put your trust in God. Understand that what you do, matters. Support the people in your community so we can all thrive. Support this parish community, because together we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and care for the orphans. Do all those good things that show our love for God and for our neighbors—as these are the two greatest commandments. I believe if we get these two commandments right, then, “*All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*” Amen.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

Psalms 1

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3960

* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_\(tree\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_(tree))