“Resurrection: The Art of Holding Together”

A sermon for Sunday, October 8th, 2017

By the Rev. Rachel Wildman

Appointed Lectionary (Proper 22, Year A):

[Isaiah 5:1-7](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp22_RCL.html#ot2)[Psalm 80:7-14](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp22_RCL.html#ps2)[Philippians 3:4b-14](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp22_RCL.html#nt1)[Matthew 21:33-46](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp22_RCL.html#gsp1)

Chris and I were at the Cathedral for most of Tuesday at Diocesan Clergy Day. During the portion of that day devoted to thinking and talking about the practice of preaching, the organizers handed out a chart to help us decide how prophetic to be with our preaching. This chart was supposed to help us make decisions about how passionate, political, or perhaps even corrective, to make our preaching given where we think our congregation might be in their desire or readiness to hear it.

The organizers introduced it as particularly apropos for this Sunday’s preaching, given the horrific events of Las Vegas, following on the heels of multiple natural disasters in which those most vulnerable had even more taken away.

I don’t think the organizers had read the readings yet, though. If they had, I think they would have found the clear, directive, 4 quadrant chart kind of…moot. I mean, we all heard the readings. They, themselves, are so intense, and political, and condemning, they hit so very close to home given the state of God’s precious vineyard, this our Island home—that whether or not we desire or are ready to hear a prophetic word and regardless of what my sermon ends up being—a series of rather jarring, prophetic words have been given to us this morning!

I admit to being relieved at not having to make a decision about how to preach TO you. Now, as is always my preference, I can join *with* you, as a fellow listener of what I find particularly difficult to hear.

Indeed, the vineyard seems so full of wild grapes and neglectful, or even actively destructive, tenants. It is so full of unrelenting need, of polarizing fear, of suffering and untended anger and violent death. Of winds and waters and guns.

Both Isaiah and Jesus ask the question I have been asking too, What *is* God to do with God’s vineyard? What? What is our God to do—our God who, I have experienced, derives her power by relationship *with* rather than control *over*, and by invitation, and by vulnerability, and by walking with us into the very same suffering that threatens to destroy the whole vineyard.

In Jesus’ own grief and angry exasperation, he says that God will take the vineyard away, and give it to a people who can actually produce wine-worthy grapes. There have been moments this week when I have cried out to God to do just that—Please, God, take it away from us---just take it away before we destroy it all--each other and the whole of creation—and give it to a people who can nurture it.

PAUSE.

I said in my newsletter column that our readings would take us to a Holy Week in October. I didn’t realize just how completely the world would cooperate with that anachronism of our liturgical calendar. The feeling of helplessness, even hopelessness that is an echo within me on Good Friday each year, was a drumbeat at points this week.

And so, I prayed, and I read, and I walked, and I cried. And in so doing, I came across this blessing for Holy Saturday by Jan Richardson. I invite you to breathe deeply, maybe close your eyes, and let this blessing nurture you as it did me.

It is called The Art of Enduring.

This blessing  
can wait as long  
as you can.

Longer.

This blessing  
began eons ago  
and knows the art  
of enduring.

This blessing  
has passed  
through ages  
and generations,  
witnessed the turning  
of centuries,  
weathered the spiraling  
of history.

This blessing  
is in no rush.

This blessing  
will plant itself  
by your door.

This blessing  
will keep vigil  
and chant prayers.

This blessing  
will bring a friend  
for company.

This blessing  
will pack a lunch  
and a thermos  
of coffee.

This blessing  
will bide  
its sweet time

until it hears  
the beginning  
of breath,  
the stirring of  
of limbs,  
the stretching  
reaching  
rising

of what had lain  
dead within you  
and is ready  
to return.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Indeed, by the end of this week, as I continue to be present to my own pain and suffering and to the pain and suffering of our world—planting myself at the door of suffering and keeping vigil and chanting prayers and bringing along many loved ones, including a number of you, for company, what has laid dead in me is now ready to return.

I have experienced again, on this Sunday morning just as I do on every Easter morning and after so many other deaths, literal and figurative, resurrection.[[2]](#footnote-2) For, we followers of Jesus *are* a resurrection people—a people who claim God’s invitation into a reality which holds together that which seems opposing.[[3]](#footnote-3) We are a people who profess the power of new life even in the midst of death—who profess the infinite even as we watch the finite pass away. [[4]](#footnote-4)

As this week has come to a close, my desire to try to hold both the suffering and the hope has returned. I am, again, a resurrection person. I am trying to mourn those whose lives were taken at the hands of another AND he who took those lives, and his own. I am trying to respect my own strong opinions of what our vineyard needs AND respect the opinions of those who fervently disagree. I am trying to watch for those who need to be rescued from their own repressed anger or fear AND watch for those who lovingly and joyfully tend to those in need. I am trying to figure out what I can do AND accept that the when and how by which God acts are ultimately mysterious.

As a resurrection people who follow Jesus—the personification of paradox--God invites and empowers us to create space where not only disparate ideas are held in tension, but where people who are seemingly opposing are held together--those who agree and those who disagree, those who are powerful and those who are marginalized, those who are joyful and those who are without hope--held…together, held together in our prayers, held together in our sanctuary, around our altar, held together in our priorities and actions.

So, now, as a closing prayer, return to the vineyard. Quiet yourself and listen…For the beginning of growth, the stirring of limbs, the stretching, reaching, rising, of what has laid dead within it, within you, within us and is ready to return. Listen for the resurrection. AMEN.

1. The Art of Enduring, by Jan Richardson in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*, Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015, p.148. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A thought that emerged as I read Mark Davis refer to Psalm 118 which talks about God’s way of dealing with us as the way of resurrection, not vengeance. (<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com>, accessed 10/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Prompted by my thinking about Richard Rohr’s talking of meeting in Jesus a collision of opposites—crucified yet risen, finite yet infinite. From Richard Rohr’s Job and the Mystery of Suffering: Spiritual Reflections, Crossroad Publishing, 1998, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A related development of footnote 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)