

Year C, March 6, 2019
Ash Wednesday
Christ Church, Mexia

Br. Jim Woodrum, SSJE, suggests that we may be entering Lent without truly experiencing an epiphany. In other words, we don't know exactly how God is working in our lives. But no need to panic, a part of Lent is to introspectively exam ourselves and our lives, and maybe that will lead to such an epiphany. Also, we know that the disciples struggled to understand Jesus, as did most people we have heard about, so it is a difficult task.

Therefore, I'd like to share a few more insights from John Philip Newell, whom I quoted Sunday, that may be helpful to us. First, "In the Celtic tradition, the Garden of Eden is not a place in space and time from which we are separated. (It is not a place in space and time, like I remember being in Montana in August, for example). It is the deepest dimension of our being from which we live in a type of exile. It is our place of origin or genesis in God." I think if we begin with this concept, we will have a better chance for success in our Lenten deliberations.

Now let me add to that concept by sharing more from Newell: "The image of God is the essence of our being. It is the core of the human soul. We are sacred not because we have been baptized or because we belong to one faith tradition over another (like being Episcopal). We are sacred because we have been born. (Think about the ramifications of that revelation – all who have been born are sacred.)

But what does it mean to be made in the image of God? What does it mean to say that the Garden is our place of deepest identity? In part, it is to say that wisdom is deep within us, deeper than the ignorance of what we have done or become (in this life). It is to say that the passion of God for what is just, and right is deep within us, deeper than any apathy or participation in wrong that has crippled us. To be made in the image of God is to say that creativity is at the core of our being, deeper than any barrenness that has dominated our lives or relationships. And above all else, it is to say that love and the desire to give ourselves away to one another in love is at the heart of who we are, deeper than any fear or hatred that holds us hostage." Wow, I wish I could create imagery like that!

Ponder these things during Lent as you seek to understand better your relationship with the Creator and with Jesus, the incarnation of that Power. But there is another thing I would also like for you to prayerfully consider during Lent. Based upon the knowledge of who we are individually and collectively, how do we fit into this community, this state, this nation and the world?

I was reading this week how Trinity (Episcopal) Wall Street recently acquired the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in California, which was struggling economically as most small graduate schools and seminaries are these days. According to The Most Reverend Michael Curry, our Presiding Bishop, "...this is about a creative relationship that will enable the seminary to train and form leaders for a church daring to be more than merely an institution."

And Bishop Curry in his most recent address to the Executive Council of the Church warns: "...if we see the church as an institution, we will not have a future." It is not because he is against institutions, but rather he counsels that we need to understand that we are baptized into a movement, or a way of life that transcends institutional thought. In fact, the earliest church was called "People of The Way" – there was no church – they were simply people who followed the way of Jesus, the way of love.

He quotes from *The Beloved Community*, a book by Charles Marsh, a professor at the University of Virginia and a scholar of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Jesus of Nazareth began the most revolutionary movement in human history. A movement built on the unconditional love of God for the world and the mandate to live that love." Then Curry expands on that quote: "(It is a) movement of people who dare to commit their lives to him and his real way of love, which is the only way to live, not just for the church, but for the world. A Jesus Movement, if it is a Jesus Movement, is about daring to live in bearing witness to his way of love. ... A church that does not live by that way has no life in it."

I love this church! This church here in Mexia, as well as the larger Episcopal Church. I am proud of this church and the way love is expressed and shared here. But I feel strongly that we need to find ways to share that love more broadly. We have such a good thing, but it is limited in time and space. We are not Trinity Wall Street, but we do have resources, and I know that we can find ways to better support the Mexia community, and even to have an impact beyond. Let us please make that a focus of our reflection this Lent as well.

Let the cross of ashes that we will soon wear on our foreheads be a theophany for us – reminding us of the love and desire for oneness we have inherited from being born in the image of the One we call God.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen