



There Was a Little Girl..., Proper 12 (C) - 2010

July 25, 2010

RCL: Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

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~~There was a little girl who lived on a street right next to a cemetery. Her school was straight across, on the other side of the cemetery. That cemetery frightened all the children who lived on her street. In fact, they took great pains to avoid the cemetery, walking all the way around it to get to the school, and then all the way around it to come home.~~

~~But not so our little girl. Every morning she would just head straight through the cemetery, and at the end of the day she would walk back, straight through, to come home, usually whistling all the way.~~

~~An elderly neighbor sat on her porch each day and watched and wondered. One afternoon, she called the little girl over as she returned from school and said to her, "My little friend, I notice that every day, all the children on our block walk around the cemetery to go to school and back, but you just walk right through. How can you do that? Doesn't it frighten you to walk so close to death?"~~

~~And the little girl replied, "Why, no. I'm not frightened, because I know that I'm only passing through."~~

Our Collect for today bids us pray for an abundance of God's mercy, that with God as our ruler and guide, "we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal." Living faithfully has everything to do with how we pass through our daily lives. Living faithfully means always being connected with God as our ruler and guide, as with one another.

The way we pass through life each day — the way we walk — matters.

One of the riches of our Episcopal hymnal supplement, *Wonder, Love and Praise*, is hymn number 791, "Peace before us":

Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet.

Peace within us, peace over us, let all around us be peace.

This beautiful prayer is, in fact, based upon a traditional Navajo prayer used regularly in congregations of the Episcopal Church in Navojoland. In part, that prayer can be translated:

Jesus Christ, just as I pray, you do it; guard me,
In my defense, stand, reach out,
Plead in my defense.
Let peace come to me from the forest stream,
Let there be peace from the lowly grass,
Let there be peace from the wind's way,
Let peace come to me from passing rain,
Let passing thunder bring peace to me.
Just by me let the dew fall,
Just by me let corn pollen form.
Beauty before me,
Beauty behind me,
Into fullness of life I have come,
Into beauty I have come.
All is peace again.
All is peace again.
All is peace again.
All is peace again.

~~How we walk through life, day by day, matters. Moving from a state of anxiety and restlessness into a way of harmony and balance is a blessing of grace that keeps us centered through whatever challenges rise to face us.~~

~~Watching children grow, from shaky first steps into the ability to dart here and there, intent on escaping their anxious parents' grasp for as long as possible, we know that it is human nature to try to cast out on our own, to make our own way. The playfulness of children is engaging, and — usually! — we smile to see their sport. Children yearn to be able to “do it all by themselves.” Doesn't being “grown up” mean taking care of ourselves — all by ourselves?~~

~~This relentless drama certainly makes life interesting for the parents of any toddler, and often for the rest of us as well.~~

~~“Doing it all by yourself” is part of growing up. But being fully grown up involves more than moving from dependence into independence. Our lessons today teach that to be fully alive means to embrace an interdependence with one another and with God, in a faith-filled confidence that leads us from life driven by anxiety and angst into life blessed by harmony and balance.~~

~~“Grant that as we pass through things temporal, we lose not things eternal.”~~

~~The first step in embracing a healthy interdependence, is to choose to turn back from the initial exhilaration of striking out on our own, to return to right relationship with those whose love formed us to begin with. Like the toddler squirming away from the embrace of her ever-loving parents, there must be a moment — God willing, before damage is done! — when the child turns and recognizes a need deeper than the need to assert her independence: a need to reconnect with her parents. What happens in that moment is a gift of grace, a seed which, with God’s love and in God’s time, will germinate and then blossom.~~

That turning point, which opens the door to right relationship restored, is grounded in the abiding, steadfast love of God, which is a constant, no matter what we have chosen to do. God chooses to include us in the dance of reconciliation, waiting for us to turn and open our hearts in some way to return and receive God’s ready embrace in that steadfast love.

Consider the exchange between Jesus and his disciples in our gospel reading as just such a moment. Jesus has gone apart to pray, and upon his return, the disciples greet him with a question, a request, which is just such a turning with an opening heart: “Lord, teach us to pray.”

It is significant, first, that the request is made at all. To ask for help is a deeply spiritual action, and not one that we are often prepared to do gracefully. To ask for help requires that we acknowledge our need of one another. It is to confess faith, confidence in the one we are asking for help. To receive and respond to that help leads to growth in our relationship with one another. It involves, at some level, healing; for to receive help from another heals us, and in that action, we become healers ourselves. So, what seems a simple request from the disciples is profound: “Lord, teach us to pray.”

What follows, of course, is the prayer loved and used by so many, so regularly, down through the centuries. The Lord’s Prayer transforms those who pray it, teaching us to walk through life in a harmonious and balanced way. Let go of what makes you anxious and restless, and trust in what God is doing around and through you, that as you pass through your daily life, you may lose not the things eternal, which is your birthright by baptism.

Our Father: “Abba,” “Father,” “Daddy,” whose love for us is so certain, it cannot be broken,

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come: may your way of justice be followed by all the people of the world.

Give us each day our daily bread: confidence that you will provide for our basic needs, each day,

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us: the

way of healing is within reach.

And do not bring us to the time of trial: grant that as we pass through things temporal, we lose not things eternal.

Yes, the way we walk through life matters. Give us the blessing of a harmonious and balanced life together. And thank you for the gift of a prayer to be offered daily to keep us on that way:

Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet.

Peace within us, peace over us, let all around us be peace.

Pentecost C

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