



PENTECOST SERMON BENEDICTUS

19th May 2024

Nikolai Blaskow

Story of the student who was angry after Chapel Service about the Lord's Prayer because it glorified power and he didn't like that God insisted on being 'worshiped.'

Story of how Goebbels, Hitler and Goering in separate Stadium addresses framed their talks around the 'Lord's Prayer' to convince Germany that Hitler was a 'God fearing man' who could be trusted.

God to Moses in the desert where Moses was hiding as a fugitive – the bush that was burning furiously but not 'consumed' when asked God's name said: *I shall be who and where and how I will be.*

Sentence

'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you,' says the Lord God; 'I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.' Ezekiel 36.26; 37.14

The Empty Chair:

who and where and how shall I be?

Pentecost's Reply

dedicated to the memory of Dr Ian Miller and in honour of Dr Anne Miller his widow

When Ian a much respected surgeon told us he had been diagnosed with Alzheimers it was matter of fact and quietly spoken.

Even when his condition took hold, it had not taken away his gentleness and cheery demeanour. Over almost three years he sat next to his dear wife Dr Anne

Miller in *that* chair on Zoom in the daily morning meditations, and after he died, the empty chair remained... for a short time.

It is that **empty chair** which informs tonight's reflection.

An 'empty chair' which uncannily ties in with Michael Wood's sermon of last week and *his* confrontation with mortality, and the empty seat on the rollercoaster.

Michael focused on the 'logic' of self-giving love. Tonight I want to explore with you what it means to 'experience' this self-giving love as revealed at Pentecost, the dynamic which *should* undergird all theology, but sadly, rarely does... especially when it is systematic... so dry, it often misses the point entirely.

Misses the point because in our sadness, in our overwhelmed state of mind (given the devastation of the world as it is and the inevitability of our mortality) how can this Holy Spirit this Advocate with which God gifts us, make any difference... *at all*, ... when the chair that is empty... stays empty? Indeed, to parody *Matrix I*, when there is no spoon... when there is no chair?

The Psalmist knows what we are talking about:

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands [God's] steadfast love, and at night [God's] song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.
(Psalm 42:7-8)

And the prophet Hosea especially, for those who know him well, will know why he knew what the Psalmist was saying:

Let us know, let us press on to know [God]; [God's] appearing is as sure as the dawn; [God] will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.' (Hosea 6:3)

At this point we turn to the Master, the empty seat on the rollercoaster. What does the Master say? This is what I think I hear Jesus say in the lectionary reading set for this Sunday, as we turn and dive this way and that way in the rollercoaster of life and of death:

I'm sending you (present continuous) the Spirit of truth, the powerful Spirit of Creation, the defender, the adviser, the comforter. When you receive the Spirit, embrace her – she will guide you into all truth – whatever she hears she will whisper in your ear. What the Father tells me, what the Spirit knows you will know. What is my Father's is mine, what is the Spirit's is mine and what is the Father's and what is the Spirit's is yours. It's pointless for you to worry about my absence – there is no absence. Needless for you to ask where I am going or where you are going. There *is* no empty seat. In fact there is no seat. How do I know? Why do I know? Because the world has just got it all wrong. *There is no alone*. We, you and I, and everything else – even including the animal, botanical and material universe are all One. It's just that they don't know it. But do *you* know it? That's the truth the Spirit is whispering in your ear.

As for the Jewish St Paul (research is still discovering who he was exactly) knew that truth so well. As we read it let us allow it to speak to us again in the way of a *lectio divina* – and in doing so listen intently for the words of God for us – individually – what *is* God saying to you, what is God saying to me?

All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply [that] birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's *within* us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy. Meanwhile... the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right [beside us] helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it really doesn't matter. [God's Spirit] does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching, [our] groans. [God's Spirit] knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. (Romans 8.22-27)

I finish with this reading from Father Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Windhover', and then a short poem by Cathy Hutcheon. Gerard Manley Hopkins, poet priest told by his Order he had to choose to be one or the other – poet or priest – God would never allow him to be both – Hopkins the poet priest was going to burn his manuscripts, when, reflecting on the theologian Duns Scotus who inspired so

much of Franciscan theology, he remembered and affirmed that it is only by being truly ourselves that we glorify God.

I think this revelation of the preciousness of all who *we* are, just sings for joy through the poetry.

The Windhover

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Source: *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985)

And now the beautiful simplicity of faith of *Cathy Hutcheon's* faith in the midst of doubt.

Your love comes to me
in the silence,
ordinary.
Like a child's treasure
I turn it over
in the nook of my hand,
warming its smooth
heaviness.
A thought of You,
stony,
clearly defined,
drops as though
down a deep
well,

is lost
momentarily,
then turns up
a certainty in the heart.

AMEN

Who are you Ian we may well ask. And I can just hear the answer blowing in the wind: I will be who and how and where I shall be.