

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: 10 July 2022
Incarnation, Santa Rosa
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[Proper 10 C: Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37]

*Show me your ways, O LORD, * and teach me your paths.*

*Lead me in your truth and teach me, * for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.*

How are we to find our way—faithfully find our way—in these times? How do we walk the walk? What is the path?

This theme of the path, the walk, appears not just in our psalm today; it's also there in the reading from Colossians. We heard “so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord”, but the Greek is, “so that you way *walk* in a way that is worthy of the Lord.” And in the parable of Jesus, the road, and those walking down it, and what they do along the way—how they walk, if you will—well, *that's* the story.

How is your walk?

When I looked at the Greek text of Colossians—including that passage I just read—I was struck by the echoing recurrence of a word—or rather two intimately related words—though once again this is obscured in the translation we heard. I think this recurring echo sets out a sequence, a path, if you will. The words are ἐπίγνωσις (epignosis) and ἐπιγινώσκω (epignosko). The noun ἐπίγνωσις, is perhaps best translated “full knowledge,” with the verb ἐπιγινώσκω meaning “to fully know,” to recognize, comprehend, understand. This is the word Paul uses—twice—in 1 Corinthians 13 when he writes, “Now I know in part, but then I shall *know fully*, even as I have been *fully known*.” The first time it appears in our reading today it's the verb, and in the translation we heard it's rendered as “truly comprehended”, but here it is rendered “fully knew”:

You have heard of this hope... in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and fully knew the grace of God.

So: A moment of *fully knowing* the grace of God.

Then, just a bit later, the noun form—ἐπίγνωσις, “full knowledge”—appears twice, though we heard it both times simply as “knowledge.” Here's that passage again—but using “full knowledge”:

We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord, entirely pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the full knowledge of God...

I was struck by this sequence: First, fully knowing God's grace; second, coming into the full knowledge of God's will; third, growing in the full knowledge of God. In a way, Colossians seems to lay these out as past, present, and future, or let's say beginning, middle, and end: fully knowing God's grace is the beginning, followed by the full knowledge of God's will, and finally growing in the full knowledge of God, Godself.

God's grace, God's will, Godself. We begin with an experience of God's infinite love and mercy and generosity toward us. Then, it's that grace that begins to show us God's will, what God desires and intends, because God's grace is an *expression* of what God wants. And, just as with anyone, what God wants and desires and intends is an expression of *who God is*.

That is the path that we walk, from the full knowledge of—or understanding, comprehending—

God's grace, to the full knowledge of God's will, to growing in the full knowledge of Godself. I don't think this means that we once for all move from knowledge of God's grace to knowledge of God's will to knowledge of God. I, for one, am not so sure I yet have full knowledge of God's grace. Rather, it's a sequence for us to move through continually, always coming back to grace as the experiential foundation and growing in intimacy with God as the destination.

Does that make sense?

Can we trust and believe that we are on this path, in Christ who is the way, the truth, the life?

Growing. Growing in the full knowledge of God. This recalls the imagery of fruitfulness this passage also celebrates. We also heard about fruitfulness in the reading from Deuteronomy. It also recalls Jesus's imagery in the Gospel of John about abiding in him as the branches of the vine, and bearing much fruit. And the "growing" suggests something that is alive, expanding, becoming, never complete.

This is a theme that's picked up in particular by St Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335—c. 395), perhaps the greatest theologian of the ancient church. As Gregory taught, we are conditioned, finite creatures, and God is infinite—infinite life, infinite love, infinite being. Our path and vocation to know God, then, is to be on a journey, inside a process, of knowing and experiencing God more and more intimately, more and more deeply, more and more clearly, becoming more and more ourselves by growing more and more into God, from glory to glory, without end, forever.

But this lofty perspective is not the only way to view the path, and indeed it is essential to look at it also in more down-to-earth, blood-and-guts terms, down-to-earth like the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Jesus invokes this notoriously dangerous road to answer the Torah scholar's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", which is, after all, a question about the path, about how to walk.

When Jesus replies, "What is written in the law?" he then asks further, not as in the mistranslation we heard "What do you read there?" but rather "*How*

do you read?" Not *what* but *how*—Jesus is not asking about *content*, but about *interpretation*. The scholar then gives exactly the summary of the Law that we are more accustomed to hearing on the lips of Jesus himself—as in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. So, it's no surprise that Jesus approves of this answer: "Do this, and you will live."

Ah, yes, but "Who is my neighbor?" Interpretation again! As if to say: "You, Jesus! How do *you* read?" And so, Jesus takes him up and tells the story that is so familiar to us. This is not the only place in the Gospels where Jesus offers interpretation of how to read "you shall love your neighbor as yourself". In the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you", and in the Gospel of John, "Love one another in the same way that I have loved you."

It doesn't hurt to keep these interpretations in mind when reading the parable of the man robbed, beaten and left half dead on the road. Just a bit earlier in Luke's story we've been reminded of the hostility that went both ways between Samaritans and Jews, Jesus's own disciples included. This is a story about loving the enemy—or rather, being loved *by* the enemy—and by the same token, about loving as Jesus loves.

As the Samaritan comes upon the half-dead man, he, as we heard, "was moved with pity." Well, all right, but a better translation is "his guts were wrenched." The verb here is based on the noun for intestines, guts, bowels. And note that it's in the passive. Jesus does not describe the Samaritan seeing the half-dead man and asking himself what was the right thing to do. No. Jesus describes a literally *visceral* response: the Samaritan sees and his guts are wrenched, and carried on by that visceral reaction, he goes to the man and cares for him. The picture we are given is love, indeed enemy-love, that is visceral *and* spontaneous.

After the story, Jesus asks, as we heard it, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" At the risk of the only thing you remember of this sermon being a string of complaints about the official translations, this really is a bad translation. What Jesus asks is, literally, "Who of these three does it

seem to you *became* a neighbor to the man falling among bandits?”

So, when Jesus says, “Go and do likewise,” it means not just *be* a neighbor, but *become* a neighbor. What does this tell us about the grace of God, the will of God, and growing in the knowledge of God?

Each of us is, or has been, or will be, in some way, at some time, a person robbed, beaten and left for dead. And each of us is coming upon that robbed, beaten, left-for-dead person, every day, in friends, strangers, enemies. That is our vulnerable human condition in this broken and sinful world. So many opportunities to become a neighbor. In Jesus, God, gut-wrenched with compassion, has come to us, cared for us, healed us, loved us, poured infinite grace upon us, no matter who we are, no matter what we’ve done, and brought us to safety.

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The more fully I know that grace, the more clearly I can know God’s will: that I go and do likewise, that all may share in this grace, abiding in that love of Christ and bearing fruit. As you and I walk in that path, down the dangerous road, letting our guts be wrenched with compassion, becoming neighbor again and again, across all our human divides, we will more and more fully, deeply, intimately know God—who and what and how God is—just as we are fully known.