

Summer Stillness Program
July 7th – 9th, 2020
Queen's House Retreat and Renewal Centre
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
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Naming the Present Moment of our Faith – Searching for Nurturing Metaphors in a Time of Receding Transcendence

Outline ...

- I. The Importance of Naming a Moment
 - II. Struggling to Name our Moment Culturally
 - III. Struggling to Name our Moment Biblically – Some Nurturing Metaphors
 - IV. Some Special Challenges within our Moment – To Ponder and to Bless
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Part One - The Importance of Naming a Moment

- **As diagnostic**

*"A symptom suffers most when it doesn't know where it belongs." (James Hillman)

*"Not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly." (Richard Rohr)

- **As a prophetic act - a "public lament"**

*There is a story told about the Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova standing in the long lines outside of a prison in St. Petersburg waiting to leave letters and packages for loved ones caught up in Stalin's purges, not even knowing whether they were dead or alive. Recognizing the poet, a woman approached her and asked: "Can you describe this?" Akhmatova replied: "I can," and a something like a smile passed between the two women. What had happened? Being able to describe something is both a political and a prophetic act, an act of defiance in the face of terror and an act of hope in a time that seems to be bereft of it.

- **As a form of prayer**

*Jesus: "Read the signs of the times."

*John of the Cross: "The language of God is the experience God writes into our lives."

Part Two – Struggling to Name the Present Moment - Culturally

- i) A mixed bag - various generations meeting within the same moment – “Never take for granted that everyone alive at the same time belongs to the same generation.”
Karl Rahner
- ii) David Tracy - We are living at a time when four different generations are all meeting within the same generation. We are a mixture of:
 - "pre-modern"
 - "modern"
 - "post-modern"
 - "anti-modern"

- all within a single generation.
- iii) **What is "Modernism", "Modernity" - A brief historical overview:**
 - a) **0 - 400 AD - the "Ancient" World**
 - *"Divine Authority is the ultimate guiding principle and the organizing principle for life"*
 - b) **400 - 1600 - the "Medieval" World (brought in by Augustine)**
 - *"Divine Authority is still in charge"*
 - c) **1600 - 1950s - the "Modern" World (brought in by Rene Descartes)**
 - *"Critical reason is the ultimate guiding principle and the organizing principle of public life."*
 - d) **1950s - today - the beginnings of the "Post-Modern" World**
 - *"An equal distrust of both divine authority and critical reason"*
- iv) **Some Current Naming – Metaphors to Digest**
 - **Cardinal Ratzinger** – “A post-Christian West”
 - **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** – “A world still in diapers”
 - **Sigmund Freud and the Enlightenment** – “Faith as a spent project”

- **Thomas Halik**
 - “Faith in the West as suffering noon-day fatigue”
 - “Secular humanism and Christianity today, facing off as ‘younger brother’ and ‘older brother’ in the parable of the Prodigal Father
 - We are witnessing a failure of religion not of faith
- **Charles Taylor**
 - A crisis of imagination rather than a crisis of faith and fidelity
 - The “conditions of belief have changed”
 - Our personality has changed (from “porous” to “buffered”)
- **Kathleen Norris and Louis Dupre** – Secular culture as the adolescent grandiose child of Judeo-Christianity
- **Langdon Gilkey** – We are undergoing a collective dark night of the soul
- **Walter Kasper** – “Christian vision in the West as a detached retina”
- **Rod Dreher** – We are in the same season that originally sparked monasticism - and we need to respond with “The Benedict Option”
- **Reginald Bibby**
 - A crisis of individuality rather than of faith
 - A crisis of apathy rather than of anger
 - A crisis of believing and not belonging

v) Perspective for grounding our faith and praxis

- Secularity as our child and not our enemy
- Our children as "not bad, but just unfinished"
- The deep, structural moral and religious fiber within our generation
- God's kenosis and God's non-need to be the center of conscious attention

Discussion ...

- Which “metaphor” sits best with you? Why?
- Which “metaphor” did you most disagree with? Why?

Part Three - Struggling to Name the Present Moment – Biblically: Some Nurturing Metaphors

A) A word on “language” – and its various “hedges”

B) Some Nurturing Biblical Metaphors

1) The "desert"

- *Wandering*
- *The desert - a time purification*
- *The pillar of fire*
- *The manna and its curious qualities*
- *The "forty" years*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *Our “ecclesial time”*
 - *“Lost is a place too!”*

2) The "exile"

- *The pre-exilic security: the LAND, the KING, the TEMPLE*
- *the destruction of these in the exile*
- *the "doubts and questions" by the rivers of Babylon*
- *God's answer: "You will find me again when you search for me with your whole mind and soul."*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *Our particular “dark night of faith and ecclesiology”*

3) The Tower of Babel

- *Their motivation for building the tower*
- *The result*
- *Why we speak “different” languages?*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *The over-stimulation of our grandiosity and the increase of new languages*
- *A note on – Pentecost as the reversal of “Babel”*

4) Tobit’s Humiliation

- *The story*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *Application to the clerical sexual abuse crisis today*

5) Jonah in the Belly of the Whale

- *The story – the image*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *Most everything in the world and much that is in our churches has rendered us helpless, taken away our control, and left us in darkness. We do not know where we are going, but need to trust that God is taking us where we should have gone on our own.*

6) On the road to Emmaus

- *Walking away from Jerusalem*
- *Emmaus as the place of worldly consolation*
- *Jesus meeting them on the road and their failure to recognize him*
 - *they were looking for him as he had been*
 - *they understood him as the "excluded one" that is outside God's blessing*
 - *they didn't understand that "it was necessary"*
- *Jesus restructuring their religious imagination*
- *Jesus sending them "back to the dream"*
- *The centrality of the “Eucharist”*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *We live in that time between the crucifixion of our youthful religious dream and the recognition of the Christ who is alive and walking with us.*
 - *The critical character of the Eucharist*

7) Jesus walking on the borders

- *Jesus walking on the borders*
- *The woman's initial address: "Son of David"*
- *Jesus' seeming harsh/brutal response*
- *Her response: Addressing Jesus by his universal title – “Lord, Adonai”*
- *His response - beyond "program"*
- *A note re the role of the “dogs” in this story*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *Standing on the new borders of religion, ethnicity, and gender*
 - *Standing on those borders with an innate tension between being “a son or daughter of David” and being “Adonai”*

8) Jesus cleansing the temple in John

- *In incident*
- *The seeming legitimacy of the money-changers*
- *Why they have to be removed?*
- *The deep lesson*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *For our church offices*
 - *For how we understand other Christian denominations and other religions*
 - *For how Christianity is a “language of translation”.*

9) Trusting in the Bread of Life – John 6

- *The incident*
- *The lesson – Trust to roll real life on the Gospel despite our perennial inadequacy and sense of being dwarfed*
- *A “naming” for today – Our lack of real trust in the reality of the Gospel*

10) Refusing to lie – John’s Gospel – John 9

- *The incident*
- *The lesson – Christ will find us if we are honest*
- *A “naming” for today – The loss of “truth” in our culture*

11) Not stoning others with the Commandments – John 8

- *The incident*
- *The lessons*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *A culture and a church of “stoning each other with the commandments”*
 - *Implications for “pro-life” and the death penalty*

12) Washing each other’s feet – John 13

- *The incident*
- *The lessons*
- *A “naming” for today*
 - *The challenge of compassion for today*
 - *Our capacity to “to sometimes take off our outer garment”*

13) The Gospel Invitation to the rich young man

"Abbot Lot went to see Abbot Joseph and said: 'Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, and my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence; and according as I am able I strive to cleanse my heart of bad thoughts: now what more should I do?' The elder rose up in reply and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like lamps of fire. He said: 'Why not become all flame?'"

"There is ultimately only one true sadness, the sadness of not being a saint!" (Leon Bloy)

- *The story*
- *The lesson*
- *A "naming" for today*
 - *The invitation to move from being good to being great.*
 - *Our true struggle with "being rich"*
 - *The invitation to move from resentment to grace*

14) Luke 15 – The call beyond tribalism to a "whole number"

- *The three stories*
 - *Their lesson*
 - *A "naming" for today*
 - *The call beyond tribalism*
 - *The importance of a "whole number"*
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V. Some Special Challenges within our Moment

1. The Imperative for a new maturity

- *New freedom - demanding a new maturity*
- *The power of our culture - "as a narcotic"*
- *Karl Rahner - "Being a mystic or a non-believer"*
- *Henri Nouwen - the need for the honesty to admit our immaturities*
- *Like Jesus - to go everywhere, but not sin*
- *Two special invitations*
 - *To "ponder" as Mary did*
 - *To "bless" others*

2. The Invitation to Ponder

I. A preliminary definition

- Pondering in the Greek sense - "*The unexamined life is not worth living*"
- Pondering in the Hebrew sense - "*Holding, carrying and transforming tension so as not to give it back in kind, knowing that whatever we don't transform we will transmit.*"

II. Elements of biblical pondering

- Image: Mary under the cross
 - standing as strength
 - no overt protest, seemingly doing nothing
 - holding, carrying, and transforming tension so as not to give it back in kind.
 - whatever you don't transform you will transmit

III. The opposite of pondering in scripture - "being amazed"

- the too-popular response to Jesus – amazement
- the concept of amazement - letting energy simply flow through you.
- an image - "the electrical wire" that simply conducts energy

- ✚ simple conduit for either virtue or crucifixion
- ✚ unwillingness to carry and transform tension
- ✚ The contrast - an example

Bridges of Madison County versus Sense and Sensibility

- **The virtue of the Scribes and Pharisees – amazement**
- The difference between "awe" (wonder) and "amazement"
- **The lesson**
 - holding tension and transforming it (e.g., Jesus)
 - taking away the sin of the world"

IV. Its effect - transformation and "taking away the sins of the world"

- Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
- Jesus pondering: "sweating blood"
- How did Jesus take away the sins of the world?
 - Early Christians immediately saw him as their "scapegoat", i.e., as the lamb slain for them
 - Various metaphors and icons to explain this
 - How is Jesus our "scapegoat"?
 - The concept of "scapegoat"
 - as needed to form community (against not for)

- they immediately recognized Jesus as doing this
 - How? By "pondering" - not giving back in kind
 - taking in hatred, giving back love
 - taking in curses, giving back blessing
 - taking in bitterness, giving back graciousness
 - taking in jealousy, giving back affirmation
 - taking in murder, giving back forgiveness
- Image - "the water purifier, filter", takes away the toxins by holding them inside of itself

V. The standing - invitation to us as "adults"

Kierkegaard: "Jesus wants followers, not admirers"

- This is the invitation to Adult discipleship
- Some caveats:
 - We don't absorb abuse in the name of pondering
 - When we are ready for this and when we aren't
 - Carrying tension - without bitterness and resentment
 - The gospel as "kicking in" to the degree that we are ready
- When doing nothing is enough

VI. Difficulties in doing this

- What to do with our own, sometimes overwhelming, tensions?
- Our innate sense of injustice and outrage at being wronged
- Our innate need to speak our piece ... obsessional neurosis
- Giving up our need to be right

VII. Some aids in doing it:

- Jesus: Nobody takes my life; I give it up freely, the pre-emptive strike that undercuts resentment

The Invitation to Bless Others

What is a Blessing?

- **A story of non-blessing.**
- **What is a blessing?**
 - *Bonhoeffer: A blessing is visible, perceptible, effective proximity of God.*
 - A ritual blessing.
 - The word: **BENE DICERE** (to speak well of somebody)

- Biblical examples of God blessing:
 - ✚ *Genesis 1: God blesses the earth and our lives ("It is good!")*
 - ✚ *The Baptism of Jesus – "This is my beloved child in whom I take delight."*
- **Blessing as seen by its opposite - a curse.**
- **Components of a blessing:**
 - Seeing and admiring a person
 - Speaking well of them - delighting in them
 - Giving your life so that they might have life ...
 - Maturity as coming at the moment when we begin to die and give our seed away - analogy of a flower
 - An image - deconstricting the heart/body
- **Its opposite - components of a curse:**
 - not seeing, demanding that we be seen and admired
 - demanding that we be spoken well of
 - using other people's lives to build up our own
- **A note - blessing as "coming down from the top"**
- **Some examples of blessings**
- **A Poem from William Butler Yeats**

*"My fiftieth year and come and gone.
 I sat, a solitary man,
 In a crowded London shop,
 An open book and empty cup
 On a marble table-top.
 While on the shop and street I gazed
 My body of a sudden blazed;
 And twenty minutes more or less
 It seemed so great my happiness
 That I was blessed and could bless.
 (Yeats-Vacillation)*
