



Proper 12, Year C – June 20, 2010

1 Kings 19.1-4,8-15a; Psalms 42 & 43; Galatians 3.23-29

A Homily preached by the Very Rev'd Robert T. Pynn

The Opening of Eyes

*"Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?
Why are you so disquieted within me?"
"Why this deep despondency, this deep despair."*

The poet has penned a mantra of human melancholy.

In fact we find it in both Psalms of the Day (42 & 43) and having read the I Kings narrative it is easy to see in our minds the iconic figure of Elijah bent inward by the emotive weight of his great despair.

The experience is universal. We have all felt a similar inner heaviness of soul to some degree or other. Ironically it is often felt after the euphoria of great accomplishment or some momentous event. When we give over to the egoic emotion of our achievements (or losses) we enter a loop of insatiable dependence on that emotion.

The purpose of what we have been about is easily consumed by the ego satisfaction of our achievements. This 'high' passes quickly and we are left with emptiness that deepens the more we travel the egoic feedback loop.

We come to think we are the last person standing and surrender to the illusion of our isolation. Like Elijah, we retreat like a hurt child into the figurative arms of Mother at the mouth of our cave. (I have a very conservative friend who would call this emotional socialism.) This is the shadow side of experiential religion. It can get all tangled into a dependency relationship with another being who becomes the sole source of our personal needs and the one we secretly blame when we do not get what we want.

God never meets flawed expectations no matter how insistent we may be.

What we do get is sheer silence and we are terrified by it. We wrap our face in our mantles and flee into the noise of our own fears at the entrance of our cave of disquiet.

God, what is the matter with you! I have been an award- winning contributor, zealous in good- works. I have defended your cause in the world against all odds and defeated your enemies. I have even put up homeless shelters for the vanquished. Why am I left in this unholy funk!!

Even the noise of our despair becomes more palatable than the sheer silence.

do not
fear
the silence

it is anything
but quiet

but
do not enter
if you are not
ready to
hear what
you have never
had ears to hear

you are deaf
from wandering
your small
corridor
of noise

take off
your earphones
file
the remote

set your face
toward the riot
vibrating
in the profound
depths of silence

split the bud
and let the flower
open

the centre
will release
mysterious
fragrances
that confound
the predators
roaming
the surface
of your mind

turn to the
core of your
core
whose press
pours out
virgin oils
to anoint
you for burial

this will
be your
beginning

- Robert Pynn from *Lifelines*

What is this burial that becomes our beginning? It is the burial of our egoic illusions and the disquiet they wind around our souls.

We fear the sheer silence because we think it means isolation and abandonment but it is any thing but that.

Silence is a place full of sacred presence. The voice of God screams in the silence. It is in sheer silence that we begin to hear for the first time.

But do not expect to hear words or any quick-fix solutions: rather an imperceptible dawning or resonance with a way forward. Get up, take real nourishment (not the salty dregs of your tears). Leave the cave. The very despair you feel can be the splitting of the bud from which your true self can unfold like a flower anointed with the virgin oils of a new beginning.

That day I saw beneath dark clouds
The passing light over the water
And I heard the voice of the world speak out.
I knew then, as I had before,
Life is no passing memory of what has been
Nor the remaining pages in a great book
Waiting to be read.

It is the opening of eyes long closed.
It is the vision of far-off things
Seen for the silence they hold.
It is the heart after secret conversing
Speaking out loud in the clear air.

It is Moses in the desert
Fallen to his knees before the lit bush.
It is the man throwing away his shoes
As if to enter heaven
And finding himself astonished,
Opened at last,
Fallen in love with solid ground.

David Whyte from *Songs for Coming Home*

In his moment of silent wonder before the burning bush, Moses senses an inner impulse: "Shed your shoes, you are standing on holy ground." The term 'shed' in the biblical text is the term used for an animal shedding its skin. Moses falls to his knees astonished and disarmed.

The burning presence of the Holy One peels the opaque membrane that has acted like a closed eyelid starving his heart of light. He sheds the tough skin of the false self he has so carefully layered over his soul to protect him from his own fearfulness.

He now knows it is not just at this moment that he has entered the presence of the sacred; every step of his life has been on holy ground. His inner eye long closed in sleep is open at last and he is fallen in love with solid ground.

David Whyte calls his poem, *The Opening of Eyes*. He could have called it "Justification through Faith".

You may remember that phrase as a theme of our readings from Galatians during the last few weeks. Scholars of Luther will be especially familiar with it. Justification by faith alone has been a battle cry of Protestant theology!

In today's Epistle St Paul is keen to move his readers out of the minute conventions of law into the transformed consciousness of faith's communion.

To discover this mysterious dimension of faith we need to step beyond some of the conventional thinking we have inherited. Not deny it (Jesus said that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. We are called discover faith again within the skin of a new energy.

Conventional faith has often been identified with right thinking—the Faith as structure of belief spiked with the moral overtones of personal justification and a piety of doing the right thing.

The goal is to bring about a right relationship between human beings and God, who are in order of magnitude, not the same. We have spend significant effort maintaining the divide while pursuing a moral relationship with a divine being outside the cave and its deep inner silence.

The Elijah story opens another perspective that takes the theme of right relationship with God into a deeper dimension of mystery. Here the right words of a conventional justified relationship are lost in the vibrant silence of wholehearted union. The old conventions are shed like skin as Faith becomes the opening of eyes.

The burning presence of the Holy One peels the opaque membrane that has acted like a closed eyelid starving our heart of light. We shed the tough skin of the false self we have so carefully layered over our soul to protect us from our own fearfulness.

We now knows it is not just at this moment that we have entered the presence of the sacred; every step of our life has been on holy ground. Our inner eye long closed in sleep is open at last and we find ourselves astonished. Once obsessed with finding heaven we are now fallen in love with solid ground.

The divide between sacred and the secular is dissolved. The solid ground is the place of love become vow, and vow becomes compassionate action. The old divide between inner spirituality and outer engagement is dissolved. Prayer and social action have become one.

Now we know that the legion of predators that would divide our consciousness and lure us off track cannot be banished by righteous effort. It is the sacred song of silence that opens the eye of the heart and enables us get up and fulfill the deep vow of love burning within.

No longer deluded that we are alone. We are free to join all those who have fallen in love with solid ground and collaborate to justify its terrain with the lifelines of its Sacred Core.