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Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

February 21, 2016; the 2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17- 4:1; Luke 13:31-35.

In the Midst of Life

“...their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.”

Our citizenship being in heaven means that we ground ourselves, we are most grounded, in the things of God---even as we participate fully in our lives in time and space.

We do our jobs; we take care of things that need to be done...there is always something that needs to be fixed isn't there...in the space of 24 hours both of my car headlights went out and the doorknob to my front door broke, just broke, I have it in place right now with duck tape.

It can be hard to think about our citizenship being in heaven ...that we are defined by the greatness and power and love of God.

We tend to the earthly relationships that we have...the good ones, and the difficult ones.

All of our engagement, with all that makes up our lives, goes better when we ground ourselves in God and know ourselves to be God's children, God's precious ones; the ones God comes to help and save again and again.

Hold on to those moments of grace in the midst of life...when you know that love of God, that peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.

There have always been spiritual movements that have maintained that in order to be close to God, one needs to be apart from the world.

Cults are especially like that...with crazy charismatic leaders seeking to focus all the attention and adulation on themselves.

Mainstream Christianity maintains just the opposite, by affirming the need to be in the world, and the need, the call, to be engaged with the issues of our lives and of our times.

This is why politics are important to us and something that we believe our faith informs.

This is why matters of environmental concern are valid topics for discussion and action for the church community.

We have a Lenten book study entitled "the Wounds of Creation" happening this Lent, led by our HoCo Eco group.

We installed a rain garden in front of the church on Monument Ave. to help the environment and to show our neighbors that we are about the issues of our world.

There is nothing in the world outside of God's concern; and therefore there is nothing in world that we as Christians can ignore or dismiss as unimportant.

Now, of course, we can't all focus on everything, and that is where discernment comes in --- we discern through prayer and discussion with each other---to know what God calls us to be about in this life as a community of faith and as individuals...and that can change from year to year.

The key to engaging with all the matters of life, is to know that our citizenship is in heaven.

The key is to know that our strength comes from God, and that our value, who we really are, cannot be measured by the things of the earth, but rather by our identity in God---this is true for all people---and for Christians, we often speak of our identity in Christ.

The season of Lent gives us a time to live into our identity in Christ in deep and meaningful ways.

Lent is a time to open ourselves more fully to know who we are in Christ.

As Christians, we have decided that the story of Jesus tells us what we most need to know about God...there are different ways of phrasing this...that we know Jesus to be the Christ of God...that Jesus is God incarnate...that in answer to Joan Osborne's song, entitled---"One of Us" (what if God was one of us)---we want to say something/know something.

What about that question?

What about the answer

...what if,

what if we look at Jesus, what if we look to Jesus and know God, see God, and know ourselves to be the ones who follow the way of Jesus...what if?

This question can frame or inform our Lenten experience.

For the Lenten experience is a journey to the cross...and to the liminal place where death and life are blurry.

The Lenten experience is a journey to the edge, where it looks like we will fall into death with Jesus, but, wait, God is about to do a new thing.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus is being warned that he is in danger, that the Herod Antipas wants to kill him...this is the son of the Herod who tried to kill Jesus when he was a baby.

But then as now, the kingdom of the world has no power over the kingdom of God.

Jesus doesn't need to be warned because he has a good idea of where this is all going...but he is not here yet, they are not there yet; Jesus is still about his work in the world, casting out demons and performing cures.

Jesus is being clear that the those who set their hopes on the earthly ruler will be disappointed...that fox has no access to the ones sheltered under the wings of the mother hen.

One commentator describes the situation with these words:

"Jesus dismissed Antipas as powerless to prevent him from carrying on

the mission to establish God's rule on earth. Echoing a theme found often in the Fourth Gospel... (John's Gospel), Luke has Jesus imply that his enemies have no power over him until the time set by God for Jesus passion and death. Jesus asserts that he will continue his ministry and his journey to Jerusalem, where his divinely determined fate awaits him. Antipas can do nothing to stop him."¹

Jesus was involved in the politics of the time because the rulers of the time were oppressing the people and dishonoring God; Jesus was involved in the politics because his way of establishing God's reign in the world was in direct conflict with those who had the earthly power.

Jesus is saying that his journey to the cross will go on. We join Jesus on this journey today and during Lent, knowing that we follow the way of the One who shows us who we are as citizens of heaven...what it means that our citizenship is in heaven.

Certainly part of what it means, as it did for Jesus, is that we live out this citizenship in the midst of our lives with our headlights that go out and our door knobs that break.

There are those bothersome things that are part of our material lives, but it is also in the midst of material that we may feel God tugging on our hearts or providing a chance for us to be about things of heaven, the things eternal, the things that will have an eternal significance.

For our parish Lenten program, we are watching episodes of the TV show *an of Arcadia*---a program for the early 2000s about a teenage girl,

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, gen. eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year C, Vol. 2, Leslie J. Hoppe, "Exegetical Perspective," Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, Epub. Loc 2674 of 19741.

Joan, and her experience of hearing from God in the midst of life.

In the first episode, God asks Joan to get a job...with no explanation for why she should...just that God wants her to get the job.

By the end of the episode, Joan's brother who had been paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident, and had been having trouble engaging with life, is motivated to get a job because his little sister did.

Joan smiles when her brother tells her about his epiphany based on her actions...that if she could get a job, he could too.

Maybe that is why God wanted her to get a job.

I hope you can join us for our Lenten program one Wednesday or more this Lent...we had a great discussion of these and other issues this past Wednesday.

This TV show helps us consider how God really does care about what we do in this life and how it has an impact, though often we will never know the extent of the impact.

Today we are holding our annual parish meeting, which will start immediately after this service.

We are a parish; we are a community of those who seek to follow the Way of Jesus because we believe it matters...it matters to God and to our world.

We have chosen to follow the way of Jesus as members and friends of this church Holy Comforter, because this church enables us to be about the work of God in the world in particular ways.

All churches are not the same.

We have particular character...we are passionate about justice for all...we are passionate about embracing all people...we are passionate about using our minds as well as our hearts on the faith journey.

We have a long history of knowing that our citizenship in heaven is to be lived out now in this life by helping others, providing care, supporting

each other, reaching out beyond these walls, all the way to
Tanzania.

Yes, many churches do these things, but each church as a particular
personality about it---and ours is a special combination of things that
we find to be engaging in many ways.

During our annual meeting today, and through our annual meeting booklet
of reports, you will get a sense of who we are, who God is shaping
us to be...and it is good, exciting, full of possibilities.

We belong to our church, we support our church, because we
have a sense that this the community that nurtures us, even
challenges us, to live more and more for God in the midst of
earthly things. *Amen.*