

Sermon  
10 Pentecost—Proper 13-B-2  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
August 1, 2021  
William Bradbury

Exodus 16:2-4,9-15  
Psalm 78:23-29  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
John 6:24-35

A famous Zen story tells of an important man who visits a Zen Master to ask him the secret of enlightenment. The old master nods his head and begins fixing tea. He then slowly pours the tea into the man's cup, but when the cup is full the master continues to pour the tea so that it is now running out of the cup onto the table and down to the floor.

The man says, "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," the Zen Master said,

"you are full of your own opinions and assumptions.

How can you learn truth until you first empty your cup?

Come back to me when the cup is empty. Come back to me you're your mind is empty"

-----

Jesus is run out of his hometown after his first sermon precisely because the people are so full of themselves, they cannot receive the new Word and World Jesus brings.

The story of the Children of Israel going hungry in the wilderness is a story of people who are being emptied out by hunger, so that they can receive God afresh and be transformed into a people useful to God

Today Paul talks about the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, but we can't receive any spiritual gift as long as we refuse **to let go of who and what we think we are.**

-----

You may know that your vestry is taking a course led by Krista called Sacred Ground, which is "A Film-Based Dialogue Series on Race & Faith".

This is challenging material because in order to receive Christ's wisdom about being born anew, we must be willing to examine and, if necessary, let go of what we learned as kids.

One of the books we're using is Waking Up White: Finding Myself in the Story of Race written by Debby Irving, a white New England woman.

The first chapter begins with the story of five-year-old Debby asking her mother "What ever happened to all the Indians?" Her mother gives her the answer that she had received growing up: "They drank too much. They were lovely people who became dangerous when they drank liquor. They just couldn't handle it, and it ruined them really."

Five-year-olds don't question the stereotypes and stories given by their parents, so Debby didn't learn until later, as she says, that "white colonists purposely introduced alcohol to Native Americans, using it to weaken, subdue, and coerce them into signing over land and rights. She didn't learn how disease brought by our ancestors had infected and killed Indian men, women, and children, in some cases killing 90 percent of a Native nation's population."

Nor did her mother tell her "that those who survived disease found themselves in dehumanizing federal programs designed by white men to "civilize" Indians, separating them from one another and stripping them of the languages, custom, beliefs, and human bonds that had held them together for centuries.... **Her mother didn't tell her any of these things because she herself never learned them.**"

Perhaps you saw the recent news story that "**Unmarked graves containing the remains of 215 children have been found in Canada at a former residential school set up to assimilate indigenous people.** The children were students at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia that closed in 1978." BBC News

-----

-----

When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”, he is echoing the Book of Proverbs where Divine Wisdom says: <sup>5</sup> “Come, eat of my bread

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

**<sup>6</sup> Lay aside immaturity,<sup>[a]</sup> and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.”**

Living in this time of pandemic and racial unrest has caused us enough pain that most of us are hungry for the Bread of Life so that we may grow up into Christ.

Franciscan Richard Rohr reminds us: **“All great spirituality is about what we do with our pain. If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it to those around us.”** Richard Rohr

This makes me think of the DeWolf family from Bristol, RI. By the War of 1812 James DeWolfe was the biggest slave trader in the country, bringing 11,000 slaves from Africa on his ships. He was also a US Senator and a faithful member of St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Bristol, where I once did a wedding—it’s a beautiful space.

“When [film-maker] Katrina Browne discovered that her New England ancestors, the DeWolfs, were the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history,

she invited DeWolf descendants to retrace the Triangle Trade route and confront the pain of this legacy. She then made an excellent movie I saw at Grace Church, New Bedford, called "Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North", where her and 9 DeWolf heirs traced the slave journey from Rhode Island to Ghana to Cuba.

This is an external and internal journey, as they face the truth of where their family wealth and privilege come from.

**Katrina Browne says this was not a project to process her guilt but to process her grief.**

-----

**Rohr also says, "The most courageous thing we will ever do is *to bear humbly the mystery of our own reality*. That is everybody's **greatest cross.**"** Everything Belongs p.97 (Italics in the original)

-----

***To bear humbly the mystery of our own reality*** is to be willing to let go of the false stories about how smart and special we are and to throw ourselves onto the mercy of Christ.

Thankfully Life sends us trials that are beyond our natural strength to offer us other chances to claim our ignorance and emptiness.

For me bringing our first child home from the hospital was such a time as was my retirement last year after 43 years of working fulltime.

And for all of us living in this pandemic repeatedly empties our cup of our sense of control.

Farmer-Poet Wendell Berry describes how this is good news in his poem, "Our Real Work"

He writes:

Our Real Work

It may be that when we no longer know what to do  
we have come to our real work,  
and that when we no longer know which way to go  
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

-----

**But, we cry, won't I starve in such a desert?**

To which Jesus replies, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry...."