

**Matthew 6. 9-13**

'Pray then in this way:  
Our Father in heaven,  
    hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done,  
    on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
    as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
    but rescue us from the evil one.

In his book titled The Land, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says that the central temptation for Israel was to forget.<sup>1</sup> To forget *who* they were, as the people of God. To forget *whose* they were – a people redeemed from slavery by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And to forget that the land on which they settled in Palestine had come to them as a gift. Purely a gift from their creating, redeeming, traveling God.

They forgot that it was not by their own hand that all this happened. They forgot that it was the ear of God that heard their desperate cry from the brickyards of Egypt and the voice of God that called to them and claimed them and guided them.

---

<sup>1</sup>Brueggemann, *The Land* pgs. 54-57

They forgot all of that, because they stopped listening. If you stop listening for long enough, you know, you lose the ability to hear at all; even when the one speaking is loud and clear.

Israel forgot her history, she forgot her story; lost her hearing and became something other than what God planned for her to be.

So God spoke a little louder:

*Take care* that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments...lest when you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, your heart be lifted up *and you forget* the Lord your God, who brought you *out* of the land of Egypt, *out* of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness...who fed you in the wilderness with manna...*beware* lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of *my own hand* have gained me this wealth.' Deuteronomy 8. 11-17

*"My power, and the might of my own hand"*.

Brueggemann calls this the "seduction of imagining". They stopped listening and they began to *imagine* the land was theirs *because they conquered* it. They imagined the resources of the land were theirs to use as they pleased *because they owned* them. They imagined the kingdom was theirs *because they built* the palaces and the temples and the towns.

Theirs was a history that never should have happened, you know. Slaves of a powerful empire became a free people. Sojourners in the wilderness became settled, landed residents. That these things *did happen* testifies to the work and the gift of God; not to the work of their own hands. This is what Israel forgot.

And they forgot that the only way to sustain this gifted life was to stay in right relationship with the gift Giver – *remembering* where they came from; *remembering* who brought them there; *remembering* their helplessness, their tendency to very bad decisions, their need for a working pair of ears and a listening heart.

So God said again, and louder, “If you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, *I solemnly warn you...*”

But they did forget; and so they lost everything.

It is difficult to tell the story –

– of the failure of Israel to be what they were called to be as the people of God

– of the pain and suffering inflicted on the most vulnerable; those least able to stand against the greed and hubris of their kings and rulers

—of the loss to the world of the witness of a community that knew its Divine calling and lived out its Divine purpose.

It's a hard story to tell. It's even more difficult to preach.

More difficult because sermons connect the dots; because sermons ask us to make connections between what was and what is; between who *they* were and who *we* are.

And the story that wasn't pretty then is no prettier today.

I could be wrong about this; I've been wrong before. But I don't think I am. It seems to me that we—and by "we" I mean people in general and Christian folks in particular, are dangerously close to following in Israel's footsteps.

It is almost certain, in fact, we already have stepped over the line into the "seduction of imagining." Have we forgotten who *we* are and *whose* we are? Have we forgotten that this life on this planet amid this stunning abundance of wealth and resources is all a gift—every last bud, blade and breath a gift from the Creator who made it and made us?

Is this why we imagine it is perfectly acceptable, necessary even, for us to do whatever we want with the air we breathe, the soil that sustains us and the resources under our feet? Are we participants in

Israel's amnesia, saying to ourselves, "*My power and the might of my own hand* have gained me this wealth"?

Is this why there is a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico the size of New Jersey? Why there are tar sands mines in Canada that can be seen from space and felt in native communities downstream where cancer rates from leaching toxins are soaring?

Is this why the head of the EPA – now the Environmental Protection Agency – insists that economic growth is of paramount importance and no regulations are acceptable if they even slightly hinder that "progress"?

"*My power and the might of my own hand* have gained me this wealth. It's mine! All mine! My precious. I will do as I please!"

Is this, perhaps, *why* the arctic ice is melting and the seas are rising and the coral reefs are disappearing. Is this why the storms are growing stronger and the wildfires are burning hotter?

Is this why we are leaving to our children and grandchildren a planet much less abundant and life sustaining than the one we grew up on?

There is an old story told by the rabbis. This never happened, of course, but it is entirely true none the less.

The Israelites cross the Red Sea on dry land and then watch as the waters crash over the pursuing army. Miriam sings and the people dance, overcome with joy and relief. Moses, looking around, realizes God isn't at the party, so he goes looking. He finds God down by the sea shore, weeping inconsolably.

"Lord", he said, "why are you weeping?"

"My beautiful Egyptians", God cries. "They're all gone."

We celebrate our accomplishments, but God is weeping today. God weeps over the melting glaciers and the bleaching coral reefs; weeps over the raging of the wildfires and the extinguishing of so many beautiful species.

*"If you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you..."*

It's time we consider ourselves warned. It's time we remember what we seem to have forgotten – that this life on this planet amid this stunning abundance of wealth and resources is a gift – every bud, blade and breath a gift from the Creator who made it and made us. The earth is not ours to spoil and throw away.

The soil and water and air, the forests and farm fields are given *into our care*, not to our contempt. We are called and created to serve and *con-*serve Creation; not to despoil and burn it up.

And it's time, well past time, that we remember something else Israel forgot – that the only way our lives can be sustained is by our being, and staying, in right relationship with our Creator.

I'll take this even further.

The only way to sustain *the planet* on which life itself depends is to pray as Jesus taught us – *and to mean what we say* when we pray as Jesus taught us: “May your kingdom come. May your will be done *on earth*, as it is in heaven”; *on earth*, not just *in* heaven.

Because when we pray to see God's will done on earth, we are praying for *ourselves* to be shaped by that will; to be molded more and more into God's likeness. When we pray for God's will to be done we are offering *ourselves* to be performers of the Divine will; offering *ourselves* for the repair of the world.

And it is when we offer ourselves for this work of world repair that we are, to borrow Wendell Berry's phrase, “practicing resurrection.”

The Creation will be saved, *if it is saved at all*, when enough people see it as God saw it at the end of that 6th day – as “*indeed* very good.”

Only when enough *of us* fall in love with Creation, as God fell in love with it, will we stop the waste and the destruction; only then will we care more for beauty than for profit and value wonder over wealth. Only then will we practice resurrection.

*Will we do this? Will enough of us do this? Will enough of us do this before it is too late?* I don't know. I hope so. It will take a miracle; but I, for one, still believe in miracles.

Not everything is broken — *yet*. Our world is still a beautiful, abundant home — *for now*. So while we still can, while we still have breath, as long as the world continues, we *must* pray and we *must* work and we *must* let our lives and our families and our communities and our churches be molded to the practice of resurrection; to the living of God's will — *here on earth* as it is in heaven.

This has never been easy. It has never been more difficult than it is right now.

We must do it anyway.

We are the church *for* the earth, you know. This is what we were created to do —

To live not for ease, but for equity.

Not for wealth, but for wonder.

Not to become rich, but to be generous.

Not to use up, but to preserve the Creation.

To be, what Walter Brueggemann calls, “the neighborhood of (peace)”<sup>2</sup>  
on this planet God, *and we*, love. Amen.