

Sermon– “Coming and Going”

Scripture Readings – Ephesians 3:14-21, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Sunday, July 21, 2024, Blythe Denham Kieffer, D.Min.

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Our first scripture reading is Ephesians 3:14-21. With much affection, Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus and asks God to strengthen their "inner being" – their sense of themselves as God's children, that they may be rooted and grounded in Christ's love – a love that, like the sea, is too wide and long and high and deep to be known or fully understood. Let us open our hearts and minds to God's Holy Word.

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is Mark 6: 30-34 and 53-56. Amid the disciples demanding schedules of coming and going and sensing his own exhaustion, Jesus proposes they cross over in the boat to take a sabbath, a time to rest and be strengthened in their inner being. Hear what the Spirit is saying.

*The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Jesus said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*

*When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever Jesus went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. Amen.*

The title of the sermon – “Coming and Going”

The text: *Jesus said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going... Mark 6:31*

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, from whom we come, to whom we return and in whom we live and move and have our being, as we reflect together on your word, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in her book *Gift from the Sea*, echoes the call of Jesus to his disciples and invites us to come away to a deserted place all by ourselves and rest a while. In our coming and our going, Anne brings us to the water, to the shore and summons us to widen our understanding of the ebb and flow of life's tides, to strengthen our “inner being,” and to deepen our sense of self as a child of God.

Each chapter begins with a description of a shell, which she will take home with her following her time on the ocean to remind her of an insight about life and relationships. I first came across Anne's book on a visit to Captiva, Florida when our son Paul was a young boy.

Anne wrote this book in 1955, while she was raising five children in Connecticut. She was married to Charles Lindbergh, who flew one of the first commercial airmail routes between Chicago and St. Louis through Springfield before becoming the first man to cross the Atlantic Ocean in an airplane. Anne was a woman familiar with seas and the abrupt changes of life's tides. She grew up in a family devoted to literature and public service and received a degree in English from Smith College. Anne met her husband in Mexico City, where he had flown at the invitation of her father, Dwight Morrow, who was then United States Ambassador to Mexico. After their marriage in 1929 Anne involved herself in Charles' flying career, accompanying him on his survey flights for future airlines. Following the tragic kidnapping and murder of their first child, the Lindbergh's moved to Europe for protection and privacy. World War II meant yet another change bringing them home to the United States where Anne wrote *Gift from the Sea* while vacationing on Captiva Island in Florida during the early fifties. Several years later during the height of the Vietnam War, the elder statesman Charles would share lunch in Southeast Asia with one of Kennedy's economic advisors and a member of Westminster, Dr. Roy Werhle.

Amid the coming and going of a complicated and full life, Anne would retreat to the water each year where she found simplicity, solitude, and time to reflect on her many varied and changing relationships. Reflecting on her life, she writes:

*I want to give and take, to share with friends and community, to carry out my obligations, as a woman, as an artist, as a citizen. ...But I want first—to be at peace with myself. I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I want to live “in grace” as much of the time as possible. By grace I mean an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated to outward harmony... so that I may give as I was meant to give in the eyes of God.*

Who among us does not long *to live in the grace* Anne describes... to be *strengthened in our inner being*, to be *rooted and grounded in the love* the Apostle Paul describes in his prayer for the Ephesians.

Even Christ, “the shepherd to the shepherd less,” a metaphor which beckons back to David's role as king of Israel, recognized the importance of being at peace with oneself, and summoned the disciples in their coming and going, to pause, to rest, to cross over to a deserted place to become entuned with the ebb and flow of life and faith.

The sea offered Anne another insight. In the ebb and flow of the tides that shaped the shells she collected, Anne recognized that movement and change are a part of life and something to be celebrated rather than feared. She writes:

*We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity—in freedom... Each cycle of the wave is valid; each cycle of the relationship is valid. And my shells? They are only there to remind me that the sea recedes and returns eternally.*

For Anne Morrow Lindbergh the sea offered a place to be nourished and renewed spiritually, a place to be reminded of the ever-changing mysteries of life and love; and the wonders of God's creation.

A few hundred years earlier across the Atlantic Ocean, the same ebb and flow of the tides offered Galileo another gift of insight. His publication *Theory on the Tides* was part of his scientific journey toward proving Copernicus' theory that the rotating Earth revolved around the Sun. This journey brought rage and storm into Galileo's life when the Roman Catholic Church convicted him of heresy, condemned him, forced him to recant his discoveries and confined him to house arrest. For the powers that be in Rome at that time, a world in constant motion challenged the theological doctrine of an unchanging, immovable God. The Earth revolving around the Sun threatened the position of the Church as the center of the world and its ability to control. It wasn't until 1992, 350 years after Galileo's condemnation, that Pope John Paul II rectified one of Catholicism's most infamous wrongs and apologized.

The commentaries for today's lectionary readings emphasize a widening circle in the ebb and flow of God's family. We have evolved from God's fidelity to the nation Israel in the shepherd King of David, to God's fidelity to all people *every family in heaven and on earth*. In Christ's coming and going, his ministry reached beyond the narrow flock of Israel to include all without a shepherd. Our fidelity to Christ call for inclusion requires our recognition and respect of other faith traditions in our country and around the world. The ebb and flow of God's love is beyond our comprehension and our control.

The rhetoric that is emerging in recent politics about reclaiming America as a Christian nation is both concerning and dangerous because it echoes the kind of overreaching and excessive control demonstrated in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Our faith is not about politics, control, hierarchy or exclusivity.

This is not who we are or what we preach. The mystery and wonder of our faith is that the only constancy in the ever-changing world is the love of God, which like the sea, is wider and broader and deeper than we can comprehend.

In the coming and going of the tides within our complicated and rich lives, may we reach out with the same compassion as Christ, may we honor the ebb and flow of seeking rest and personal renewal, and may we celebrate the God who is our mighty fortress and, yet, whose compassion and generosity is beyond our vision. Amen.