

“Metanoia”

Meditation for Ash Wednesday
March 5, 2014 at 7:00 PM
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(Thank you, Betty Brewer-Calvert, for your spiritual inspiration and collegial research for this meditation.)

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

‘Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 ‘So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 ‘And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16 ‘And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19 ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹² Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord, your God?

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶ gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, “Where is their God?”’

Metanoia

Our word for the night is *meta·noia*.

Metanoia is Greek, meaning a transformative change of heart;

especially a spiritual conversion;

a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior

A cartoon character from back in the day named Popeye the Sailor Man

was famous for eating spinach, fighting with Bluto over Olive Oyl,

and saying, “*I yam what I yam!*”

This term has become a part of our common vernacular and a common attitude.

I am who I am.

What you see is what you get.

I can't – or won't – change.

And yet we choose to follow and dedicate our lives
to a loving, living God who calls out to us to repent,
to turn away from sin and all that separates us
from the holy and one another,
and to turn 180 degrees toward the
ways of God.

Metanoia

Here are a couple thoughts on how you and I might get to a spiritual place

where we could accept this concept
and then make change a daily practice.

First, would changing one's ways and attitudes and mind be any easier

if you knew that God has already done so?

Chris Tomlin has produced a lovely Christian song called "*Unchanging*"

Great is Your faithfulness Great is Your faithfulness You never change You never fail, O God

I like that Tomlin affirms that God's faithfulness is unchanging.

I also appreciate that across the Holy Bible God does change God's mind and ways.

In Exodus, when the Israelites worship a graven image, a golden calf,

God is so upset God

threatens to slay them where they are, in the desert.

Moses speaks up for mercy, reminding God that it was the Lord

who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, out of

slavery.

What would everyone else think?

Would they say, "Here is a God who frees people only to kill them later?"

God relents, has a change of heart and mind, and spares the Israelites.

Or how about in Mark when Jesus of Nazareth encounters the Syrophenician woman?

She is a Greek, by race a Phoenician from Syria.

She asks for mercy for her daughter.

He responded to her like this:

"Let the children first be fed,
since it isn't good to take bread out of children's mouths
and throw it to the dogs!"

She said, "Sir, even the dogs under the table get to eat scraps dropped by children!"

Then he said to her:

"For that retort, be on your way, the demon has come out of your daughter."

She returned home and found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

(Mark 7:25-30)

It does appear that Jesus of Nazareth spoke rudely to her out of some deep seated cultural prejudice or racism; yet when the Christ in Him began to see the Christ in her,

Jesus changed.

He changed his mind, his attitude, and even his daily practice of ministry.

As a matter of fact,

after this encounter Jesus began to reach out across cultural and racial lines,

and the Gospel has never been the same.

Our point is clear:

The faithfulness of God is unchanging.

The occasional flare ups and errors of the Divine were corrected and reconciled.

Since God can change – and God already has –

then we who are made in the image of God
can change our hearts and minds as well.

With this vision before him the Prophet Joel says:

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

This Word returns us to our word for the night: meta·noia

“Rend your hearts and not your clothing”

Be open to a transformative change of heart;

especially a spiritual conversion;

a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior

When the Bible speaks of repenting and returning to the ways of God,

this is what we are invited to be and to do:

change our minds, our attitudes, and our behavior.

Usually in that order.

In today's newspaper –

every morning that I try to share an article from the
newspaper

my son Henry informs me that he has already read it,

on the internet, usually the night before.

Anyway, in today's newspaper is a report about a gathering yesterday
in Atlanta.

The Global Purpose Summit featured Bernice King,
daughter of Martin Luther King,
and Arun Gandhi,
the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi,
a leader in India's independence
movement.

King and Gandhi spoke yesterday at the Cobb Energy Center.

King's father and Gandhi's grandfather
were advocates for nonviolence and peace.

Gandhi, an author and noted speaker who turns 80 this year,
lives in Rochester, N.Y.,
and runs the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute.

He said he inherited his purpose to make a difference
and to teach nonviolence in the world from his grandfather.

He was sent by his parents to live with his grandfather in India
when he was 12 for a couple of years
and left just a few months before

[Mahatma Gandhi] was assassinated in
1948.

Arun Gandhi said,

"You have to make a conscious effort

to say every morning

that I am going to be a better human being today

than I was yesterday.

It's not a switch that you can turn off and on.

Despite being born into that philosophy,

*I still have to work on it myself." **

Metanoia

"...make a conscious effort

to say every morning

that I am going to be a better human being today

than I was yesterday."

Tonight we will put on our foreheads the mark of the cross, made with ashes,

a humbling reminder that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

The ashes also serve as a vivid reminder

that no matter what has happened in our past,

God works with us right here and now, as we are,
to prepare us for a mighty future.

Let us grow together into a future which begins with changing our hearts, our minds, our attitudes,

and our behavior

to be a better human being today

than we were yesterday, for the glory
of God.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

* (“King, Gandhi tell business owners to include a purpose with profits” Atlanta Journal Constitution, Posted: 5:28 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, 2014)