



December 31, 2017 - Neither Silence Nor Rest

Given by Rev. Mattei

1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.

A new year dawns. We hope it may bring change; we hope tomorrow will be different than yesterday. Lutherans are swept up along with people of other faiths and nations in the emotional frenzy to celebrate this new chronological marker. There is a lot we hope for in terms of health, wealth and peace but our hope seems to be mostly wishful thinking as we expect a cosmological force to take care of things for us. We may want things to be different but just because we tear the last page of the old calendar and look expectantly toward the pages of a brand new one it does not mean that they will be. God might be doing new things¹ but are we aware enough to notice and to want to be part of the creative process?

The Church preaches the biblical message of salvation: a spiritual transformation experienced as personal growth and a deeper experience of life. But transformation requires that we humbly and obediently are willing to receive the mystery and embrace productive conversion (aka repentance.) The word "conversion" (or "repentance") requires change. It is said that the only person who likes change is a wet baby...and even he cries during the process. We resist change even when we see a need for it. Albert Einstein is widely credited with saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results." We want something different but we don't like the pain and disorientation that come with change.

The word "change" normally refers to new beginnings. But transformation more often happens not when something new begins but when something old falls apart: spiritual transformation is an active process of letting go.

*"Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that.
You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new.
The old will defy the new;*

¹ Isaiah 42:9; 48:6; 65:17

*The old will deny the new;
The old will decry the new.
There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it.”²*

When Love touches us and we experience new life through forgiveness and compassion our hearts are overwhelmed by Joy. God’s Holiness and Beauty whisper to us once again: You are worthy of God’s love; you are children of God; you belong and are never alone. Then we learn the fear of the Lord: the fear of losing our loving relationship with God. Then in the power of the Spirit we exult and cry out: “Abba, Father!”³ Then, touched by divine mercy we learn to look at the world with new eyes, with compassion and consideration, with modesty and curiosity. Love for the world that God has created will not allow us to be silent or to rest. Mercy for our fellow human beings will compel us to pass on the message of reconciliation and salvation.⁴ In fact, reconciliation with God and salvation are available to all but they require our cooperation as St. Paul reminds us: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?⁵

Evangelism is a taboo word for Lutherans. Yet, it is part of a disciple’s life. Grateful for what the Lord has done for us and in us, we invite others to be part of our fellowship and joy.⁶ We cannot deny others the joy of knowing the Lord.⁷ Inviting others to know the Lord is in response to an internal impulse that moves us out of complacency and onto the journey. From then on nothing remains the same, all is changed. And to make room for the change means to be available to rearrange our habits and routines. Those who will be moved to join us will come with their personal understanding and experiences of God; they will come with skills and limitations; they will seek opportunities to love and to be loved. When more people will join us we will not be left unmoved and unchanged. Are we ready to make room for others?

The central practice in mature spirituality is that we must remain in love (John 15:9). Only when we are eager to love can we see love and goodness in the world around us. We must ourselves remain in peace, and then we will find peace over there. Remain in beauty, and we will honor beauty everywhere. This concept of remaining or abiding in love (John 15:4-5) restores religion to its core purpose: to practice love of God and neighbor. Pastor and author, Brian McLaren, a leading figure in the emerging church movement, explains: “Religion is at its best when it leads us forward, when it guides us on our spiritual growth as individuals and in our cultural evolution as a species.”

There is no secret moral command for knowing or pleasing God other than becoming a loving person in mind, heart, body, and soul. Then you will see what you need to see: God, who is all

² Neale Donald Walsh, author of the series Conversations with God.

³ Galatians 4:4-7

⁴ 1 John 4; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

⁵ Romans 10:14

⁶ 1 John 1

⁷ John 4:28-30.39-42

in all.⁸ Jesus did not say, “Thou shalt be right”; Jesus said, “This is my commandment, ‘Love one another’”⁹

Change can either help people to find a new meaning, or it can cause people to close down and turn bitter. The difference is determined by the quality of our inner life, or what we call “Christian maturity.”¹⁰ The invitation to “Come...Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...”¹¹ can only imply transformation and spiritual growth. May we enjoy life in God. Let us not be silent, let us not rest for the sake of the world. Amen.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:28

⁹ John 13:34, 15:12; Matthew 22:39

¹⁰ Colossians 1:28; 4:12; Philippians 3:15; Hebrews 5:14; James 1:4

¹¹ Matthew 11:28-30