

Rev. George Arceneaux

3.3.2024

Third Sunday in Lent

Friends, this morning I want to share with you part of a poem I have come to hold close. It's one that has typified why I love this faith of ours. It's one that I hold dear today as well because of our Gospel and those money changers we hear about. The poem comes to mind because it is about what its very title is: Be Kind. A notion that seems so remote from the sellers and buyers in the temple and the chaos as Jesus drives them out and flips their tables and as they so harshly ask in return for his misdeeds some sign or wonder. I want to go slow, because I at least find poetry difficult not just in the reading but especially the hearing. So... Michael Blumenthal's "Be Kind"

Not merely because Henry James said
there were but four rules of life—
be kind be kind be kind be kind—but
because it's good for the soul, and,
what's more, for others, it may be
that kindness is our best audition
for a worthier world....

Dust's certainly all our fate, so why not
make it the happiest possible dust,
a detritus of blessedness? Surely
the hedgehog, furling and unfurling
into its spiked little ball, knows something
that, with gentle touch and unthreatening
tone, can inure to our benefit, surely the wicked
witches of our childhood have died and,
from where they are buried, a great kindness
has eclipsed their misdeeds. Yes, of course,
in the end so much comes down to privilege
and its various penumbras, but too much
of our unruly animus has already been
wasted on reprisals, too much of the
unblessed air is filled with smoke from
undignified fires. Oh friends, take
whatever kindness you can find

and be profligate in its expenditure:
It will not drain your limited resources,
I assure you, it will not leave you vulnerable
and unfurled, with only your sweet little claws
to defend yourselves, and your wet little noses,
and your eyes to the ground, and your little feet.

I believe that to be kind is at the very heart of our Gospel this morning, because it is kindness, unrepentant and unexpecting of anything in return that marks the economy of Christ as apart from that of the money changers. Because for them, the way of the world is hard and fast and invades every element of this story, cold and calculated transaction pervades everything they do from within the most sacred temple of Jerusalem and God's house to the interaction with Jesus. It's absurd! After Jesus has wrecked their stuff they say, "ok, yeah, well what are you gonna give me in return for the mess you made?" quote, "What sign can you show us for doing this" Everything is an exchange for these people whom Jesus encounters and that is the sin du jour, the sin which God and divinity and the Jesus story decry in the climax of God's history. In response to crucifixion at the hands of the world, at the hands of people like you and me, the transaction of the powers that be with the advocate for the poor and oppressed, the exchange of death for defiance, in response to a world of sin. And evil. And death. The response...

Is love. The empty tomb at Easter and the eternal invitation from God to know that the world need not live by the harsh law of quid pro quo. There is kindness. We can give up your seat to someone else on the bus. It won't benefit your lumbar necessarily, but it will mean something to that person. We can let someone go ahead of you when you get in line at the grocery store, we can ask in earnest how someone's day has been. To act in kindness not only expects no reward and in fact, the other person may ignore you totally or engage any kindness you seek to offer at all, for any number of reasons. We can be kind and give grace for that too.

I think we can all attest to how kindness makes the world better bit by bit. Fiona and I just bought a house, its official, its 1183 S. Taylor in Oak Park. And yet we were only able to buy that house because of kindness. The owners knew our story, and hoped that Fiona and I would get to raise our boy when he's born the same as how they had raised their kids in that house for 20 years. After we'd closed, they left us prosecco and a onesie for my kid when he's born that has our new address on it.

I have known the importance of kindness. And I hope that you know it too. That feeling of gratitude, or contentment, or joy that comes with an unexpected gift or understanding when a friend died. Or when you had a really long day at work. Or when you're embarrassed by a super nerdy wallpaper on your desktop background at the vestry retreat and it goes up on the projector for the treasurer report and you say "oh nooo" but its ok because Blaise Denton is totally on board with it so you don't feel so dorky. In God's house, ideally here, it isn't supposed to feel like a marketplace. It's not supposed to feel like a Walmart or a Target. It's meant to feel like those moments when you needed something and someone, for no overt benefit to themselves, offered that thing. It makes for a worthier world, for the kingdom of God. So be kind, be kind, be kind. Amen.