

Order of Service – October 23, 2016
This Little Clod of Earth That I Am

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- C.G. Jung, “This Little Clod of Earth that I am.”

1st Hymn: Simple Gifts, Green 271

Readings -- Genesis 2:7; Hokusai Says; Romans 12:4-5; Gandhi

2nd Hymn: Breathe on Me, Breath of God, Green 135

*Joys and Concerns
Musical interlude*

Prayer -- Breath on Us, Breath of God

3rd Hymn: I am an Acorn, Green 242

Pastoral reflection: “It is Enough”

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Precious Lord, Take My Hand Green 178

Benediction -- Let life live through you.

Thank yous/ Introductions / Remembrances/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting

Good morning Friends.

When he was an old man, a student asked Carl Jung “*What has your pilgrimage been?*” Jung answered: “*I have had to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am.*”

I love the thought that our pilgrimage might be the lifelong journey of coming at last, to where we are, here, little clods of earth. And so for today, let us climb down the thousand ladders, let us arrive, here, our hands reaching out to this little piece of earth. And let us sing our first hymn, **Simple Gifts, Green 271**, because it is a gift to come down to where we ought to be. We will sing two verses, and you can find them on pieces of paper on the benches.

Prayer

Breathe on Us, Breath of God. Fill us with the breath of life, that we may be living beings, alive in the Body of Christ. That we might let life live through us. That we might be simple, and free. Oh God, set us free. Let us come down, down to where we ought to be, at last. Let us stop struggling to be somewhere else, someone else, some other member of this blessed body. Help us down this pilgrim's ladder to this good earth, to these little clods of your good earth. Let us reach out our hands to the earth that gave us birth and find your hands reaching back. Take us in your hands Oh Holy one, cradle us, and breath on us, oh breath of God. Fill us, now, here, with life anew. We pray today that the way up to you, is down...down to your good earth, where we live through you and you live through us. Amen.

Benediction

Precious Lord, take our hands. lead us on down the thousand ladders home, to here, to this little clod of earth, the place just right, where we are unfolding, the way we should be. May we let the breath of life move through us. May we know we are one part of the Body of Christ. May we live with the world inside us. May we pray with God's own Breath.

Readings **Genesis 2:7** then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Hokusai Says. Roger Keyes

Hokusai says look carefully. He says pay attention, notice. He says keep looking, stay curious. He says there is no end to seeing. He says look forward to getting old. He says keep changing, you just get more who you really are. He says get stuck, accept it, repeat yourself as long as it is interesting. He says keep doing what you love. He says keep praying.

He says every one of us is a child, every one of us is ancient, every one of us has a body. He says every one of us is frightened. He says every one of us has to find a way to live with fear. He says everything is alive -- shells, buildings, people, fish, mountains, trees. Wood is alive. Water is alive.

Everything has its own life. Everything lives inside us. He says live with the world inside you.

He says it doesn't matter if you draw, or write books. It doesn't matter if you saw wood, or catch fish. It doesn't matter if you sit at home and stare at the ants on your veranda or the shadows of the trees and grasses in your garden.

It matters that you care. It matters that you feel. It matters that you notice. It matters that life lives through you...

He says don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Love, feel, let life take you by the hand. Let life live through you.

Romans 12:4-5 *For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

Mahatma Gandhi “*Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.*”

Second Hymn: Breathe on Me, Breath of God, Green 135

Message: “It is Enough.”

I had the good fortune to see the Roman Catholic Sister Simone Campbell speak in Rochester two weeks ago. Sister Simone is an activist, attorney, zen practitioner, and the executive director of NETWORK, a nonprofit Catholic social justice lobby in Washington, D.C. She said:

I sometimes think we, in the United States, think we ought to do something about everything and that it's my job to fix everything. Well it's not. That's way beyond us. It's more important, I think, that we listen deeply... and then see where it leads... If we all do our part...whatever our part is...That's all we have to do...you know how in the scripture Paul says we're one body? Not everybody is an ear, not everybody is an eye. So one day I was meditating, and I was trying to figure out what part of the Body of Christ I am. So I came up with this insight that I think I'm stomach acid, I think that's my job. It's really important for metabolizing food. And you don't need a large quantity of it. And it needs to be contained. And if it runs amok, that's called illness. It generates energy and heat. And it does all kinds of good stuff, but it's a very specific small piece that depends on a whole system to be healthy and effective.

I love this! I think it's maybe not very glamorous, to be the stomach acid in the Body of Christ, just like it's maybe not very glamorous to come down at last to where we ought to be, to our little clod of earth. but Sister Simone declared that for her, this insight brought her a sense of enormous freedom and relief. It was the relief of coming to be what she is and do what she can, no more, and no less, in the whole body that she is a part of. After hearing Sister Simone speak, I went for a walk with a friend, a mother of a five month old baby. Wearing her baby as we walked, she spoke of reading about how the rising ocean temperatures this summer caused a massive die-off of large marine mammals. Looking down at her baby, asleep on her chest, she mourned “I never feel like I am doing enough. But I can’t do more.”

I know that feeling. It’s overwhelming, and it’s despair inducing. I spent the better part of two decades living in that overwhelm and despair. In my early

twenties, I read assiduously about the many fronts of impending global social and ecological crisis. I lived vigilantly within a sense of approaching calamity. I made every choice as if it was potentially the one that would make all the difference, that would save everything, and nothing ever felt like enough. I was not, in those days, as you can maybe imagine, very much fun at parties. At one upscale gathering for a wedding rehearsal dinner that I remember in particular, I had just learned about the extent of damage being done to the earth's atmosphere, and the scientific work predicting the cascading consequences for complex life on earth that we were likely to see because of it. Over the catered cheese platters, amidst the tinkling wine glasses and chit chat, I felt compelled to talk about what I knew. I remember vigorously speaking to one man, trying to convey to him the image I carried with me of the curvature of the earth in space, with just the thinnest pale blue line of breathable air and atmosphere the precious margin standing between us and cold oblivion. With due diligence I entreated him not to be cavalier. In hindsight now, I can see his polite but increasingly desperate edging away from me, his eyes searching out someone, anyone, to save him from the feverish young woman who was holding him captive with her insistence that he pay attention to the suffering, imperiled world. I recognize now his final, abrupt, hasty retreat to go get another drink. It wasn't my passion that was the problem, or my sorrow for the world or even my anger at everyone. What was happening was that I really needed to be able to do more than I could. And I couldn't. I just couldn't do more than I could.

And here we are, 20 years later. The things I was reading about before that party have all come to pass, and much, much more. The approaching calamity, Friends, has not abated. We all know the bad news, on all the fronts. And this week, all of these things -- *the young woman that I was at that party, desperate to change everything and get everyone else to change, too; my friend, nursing her baby, reading the terrible news that she cannot change; the terrible news itself; Carl Jung's pilgrimage to the little clod of earth that he was, after all, and Sister Simone's work as the stomach acid in the Body of Christ* -- all of these things came together in prayer with a person I've just met. This person is incapacitated in multiple ways, confined to a wheelchair, and suffering from a terribly disfiguring disease. When I arrived she reached out her hand and asked me to pray. I held her hand and said a prayer. After I said "Amen," there was silence for a moment, and then with her eyes closed she fervently thanked God for the opportunity to pray.

You cannot look at this person without seeing her disease. It is deforming in an extreme way. Down a thousand ladders, with no ability to do anything that anyone would call ‘enough’ for the suffering world, she thanked God for the opportunity to pray. That is what she could do, and she did it. In all my years of pilgrimage, I have not *come down so close to the clod of earth that I am, or had as much faith that I am to do the insignificant thing that I can, no more or less, or let life live through me* with the grace and humility and courage that lived in that prayer.

I know I’ve said this before, but the words for human and humility come from the same Latin root for humus, for soil. The Hebrew name, Adam, given to the man in our reading from the ancient creation story in Genesis means literally, “the one formed from the ground.” And that story tells us that the pilgrimage begins where it ends, with the earth. That we are the earth itself, come to consciousness, carrying the breath of God. Perhaps the greatest pilgrimage we can make is to here, where we are. Climbing hand over hand down the rungs of these thousand ladders until we can at last reach out those hands to the little clods of earth that we are -- humble, human.

Maybe it doesn’t matter, truly, whether we saw wood or write books or watch the shadows of trees and grasses, or sit in our wheelchairs, where we will spend all of our remaining days. Maybe it matters if we use God’s own breath to thank all that is Holy for the opportunity to pray, to live with the world inside us. To know that the breath of life lives through us, and we are only to be what we are, and to do our part. Perhaps, after all, it is enough.