

Order Of Service
April 12, 2015
“What Is Unbreakable Rises in Us”

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Welcome and Invocation

Good morning Friends. Last week we shared a beautiful Easter worship in which A.T. invited us to consider the resurrection a miracle that is ongoing, continuing, and we a part of it. In denominations that follow the liturgical calendar, this is the second Sunday of Easter, and the day when the readings from scripture tell the

story of the risen Jesus gifting the apostles with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and charging them with the work of being a resurrection community, alive together in the mystical body of Christ.

Today, and every day, Easter continues. And this is Tax Week. For those of us who file taxes with the Internal Revenue Service, Wednesday is the deadline for filing. As we enter Tax Week let us worship together as a resurrection community, guided by that belief in what is unbreakable, what is transformative, what is God's.

First Hymn *Though I May Speak With Bravest Fire*

Readings

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Mark 12:17 Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and render unto God that which is God's.

Where Is God? -- Mark Nepo

It's as if what is unbreakable—
the very pulse of life—waits for
everything else to be torn away,
and then in the bareness that
only silence and suffering and
great love can expose, it dares
to speak through us and to us.

Second Hymn: *Mid All the Traffic of the Ways*

Joys and Concerns

Interlude

Prayer

Holy One, Unbreakable Pulse of Life, moving in us and through us, binding us one to the other: there is no place you are not, no person in whom you do not dwell, no corporation, no government that is barred from your sight.

Yet in our daily lives and in our collective endeavors we forget that this is so. How can this be? Stir in our hearts here this morning, cause us together to know and feel your indwelling Light, dwell among us, live in and through us. today and every day, let it be Easter, let us live as Jesus did, fully human, fully alive in Christ, as we move in this beautiful green, blue, waking world, your beautiful world, this world in which we so often forget what is true, help us to remember. we belong to each other and to you. we belong to what is unbreakable. Walk with us, and help us to walk with you.

Third Hymn: *Down by the Riverside*

Message

Fourth Hymn: *Who Are The Patriots*

Benediction:

Go forth into the world in peace

Be of good courage

Hold fast that which is good, that which is unbreakable.

Render to no one evil for evil

Strengthen the fainthearted

Support the weak

Help the afflicted

Honor all persons

Act Justly, Love Mercy.

Walk humbly with your God.

Message:

10 years ago this week, I openly filed my taxes as a war tax resister. I continued to do so for another two years, and I was an active resister when I first came to Poplar Ridge. At that time, our country was two years into the post 9/11 war on Iraq and in response I developed exacting, onerous, perfectionist standards for the life of the peace-maker, which I thought I was trying to be. I wouldn't have used these words then, because I learned them here, but I was attempting, with every fiber of my being, to affirm and answer That of God in Creation.

I reflected on these choices 10 years ago recently as I heard a radio program exploring the activism that has been taking place one lake over on Seneca Lake. Members of our meeting have taken an active role in this local struggle to oppose the storage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas in abandoned salt caverns beneath the Lake, and to articulate an alternative to continuing to develop the infrastructure for a fossil fuel based economy. This radio show was a call-in format. There had been a man on the show in favor of the storage proposal and when I tuned in there was a man from We Are Seneca Lake responding to calls. One man who called in said ***“Anyone who is an activist there at Seneca Lake, if you are cooking with propane, or using fossil fuels in your life, you are a hypocrite. You are a Not-In-My-Backyard hypocrite.”***

Ouch. This was a hard comment to hear. (I was driving at the time!) I have heard this charge of hypocrisy frequently leveled at those seeking systemic change of the system that we are all in. It is often part of the political discourse in this country, for people to pounce on and expose those places, like use of fossil fuels, where activists are caught in the paradox of living within the system we are trying to critique, and participating in the very dynamics we would seek to change. I've heard this kind of charge often leveled at people opposed to costly fossil fuel extraction, that if we're going to take a position opposed to continued fossil fuel exploration, the only way to credibly do so is to disavow and disinvest from all fossil fuel use in our own lives. I've also heard this judgement leveled at people opposed to war, that we are the beneficiaries of war-making, and so we have no morally consistent place to stand in opposition to it. The implication of these

arguments is that the only way to legitimately seek transformation of systemic injustices or harms is to completely extricate oneself from the system that we are critiquing, first, somehow, before we can credibly seek to change it.

It is a simplistically powerful argument and a powerful tool in a sound bite, “gotcha” political culture. As a judgement it also cuts deep. Because there is truth there, and it is a painful truth. For many people with a spiritual commitment to peace, to peace-making as a practice, to honoring That of God in our world, we would like nothing more than a system that doesn’t require our participation in the very situations that we would change if we could. If only there was another system we could jump into instead. but, here we are. In this one.

When I decided to be a war-tax resister, it was because I found belonging here in this system intolerably, excruciatingly uncomfortable. At that time, I was not able to simultaneously inhabit the world that I saw in desperate need of change, which included me, and the world that I could imagine to be possible. It caused great distress to live in the gap between what I saw unfolding around me and what I envisioned as a better way to live.

I think That gap is the place where the historical Jesus lived his life. Jesus offered his ministry as a mystic, a healer, a wisdom teacher, a radical critic of the domination system and of complacent complicit religion. He did so from that paradoxical place of simultaneous inhabitation in the world that was and the transformed world that he could powerfully envision and call everyone to participate in creating. The Way to Peace-making for Jesus and for us is the way through this paradox, being present to what is, and at the same time holding intention for what could be.

In the famous “render unto Caesar” passage from Mark, Jesus’ statement is in answer to a question from Pharisees and Herodians -- the Temple’s gatekeepers and agents of Herod, Caesar’s clients, who were sent to trap him, to trip him up. They ask him: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?”

The emperor Caesar was the head of an imperial domination system that benefited the elites. Through taxes and ownership of farmland, the wealthy and powerful

extracted about two thirds of agricultural production, leaving the farmers who produced that wealth, about 90% of the population, the remaining one third. (By comparison, today, the bottom 90% of the US population owns about 23% of the total wealth, so less of a percentage than in first century Palestine under Caesar.) The tax that Jesus was questioned about was the annual tribute tax to Rome. Jews were divided about this tax. The Temple authorities and their retainers collaborated with Roman rule and endorsed the tax. But Jews sympathetic to the resistance to Roman authority rejected it. Such refusal was the equivalent of sedition.

Either a yes or no answer to this question would have gotten Jesus in trouble. "Yes" would have discredited him with those who found the imperial domination system reprehensible. "No" would have made him subject to arrest for sedition. The gospel report suggests that Jesus cleverly evaded the trap, responding in a deliberately enigmatic way that begs more questions.

What belongs to Caesar, and what belongs to God?? Could anything that belongs to Caesar not also belong to God? Are there two separate realms and one where God is not? Can we have a foot in both kingdoms? we are left to wonder about the fine print: what if Caesar is an unjust or illegitimate authority? What if the emperor is Hitler, or apartheid, or a global fossil fuel based corporate auction of the entire Earth?

When I was a war-tax resister, I attempted with all of my might to act justly. But I didn't necessarily love mercy. In fact, my mind was not a very merciful place, especially not to myself. Nobody could live up to my standard of correctness. That man's comments on the radio resonated for me, because I spent many years trying to eradicate any contradictions, any inconsistencies in my political, economic, ecological and moral life. I sought utter alignment between belief and behavior. I couldn't sustain it. It became a grand gesture that I couldn't maintain. The IRS asserted its authority, the threatening letters and the agents coming to my door were more scary than I was prepared for, and, to my cringing shame, my long-suffering and ever-supportive parents helped their then -30-something, daughter pay her debt to Caesar, which, with fines, was far higher than any taxes I ever owed.

I pay taxes now. I believe in pooling our resources and working together. As such I support research and development into new weapons, and because of complicated tax codes and tax breaks, I support corporations who profit from the sale of weapons and the development of fossil fuel technologies, the militarization of the police domestically and the securitization of culture that can be seen in present day Palestine, and the use of weaponized drones. I also support health care for children, early childhood education, nutrition programs for mothers of young children, research into disease prevention and treatment, renewable energy, roads, schools, and many other priorities that are part of our collective endeavor, made possible with federal funds. I do cook with propane. I render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, very uncomfortably, and I hope with honesty about the ways I am complicit in harm and injustice. Meanwhile, I try to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

Friends, I think the story of Jesus is an example of one man's attempt to live centered in Christ, practicing the religion of his ancestors, not rejecting it, but reforming and radicalizing it. listening to the still small voice of God, while engaging and critiquing the power and domination systems of his day. I see in his story a mirror, reflecting back to us our own contemporary search for the sacred in the midst of the injustices of our time, our own attempts to walk humbly with God, to let our outward paths be an expression of that inward dwelling in Christ.

As we rejoice in this season of resurrection, I want to celebrate the man, Jesus, as well as the Christ. In Jesus' life ministry, in his non-violent acceptance of a horrifically unjust, gruesome death, AND in the mythic stories of his resurrection, in the mystical experiences of a love and a spirit of common service that lives on, in our continuing participation in the work of the Risen Christ, Jesus' life proclaims that the Unbreakable Pulse of Life did not then, and does not now belong to Caesar. Despite 2000 years of various attempts to domesticate the Light that rises, there still is yet mystery over which Caesar is not sovereign. Jesus was executed by Caesar because he was perceived to be a threat to Caesar. And yet, what was unbreakable lived, and lives still today, rising in us.