

Unless You Become Like a Little Child

Trinity Church Boston

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Lectionary: Psalm 14; 2 Samuel 11:1-15; John 6:1-21

The LORD looks down from heaven upon us all, *
to see if there is any who is wise,
if there is one who seeks after God.

There is a common complaint that mainline churches are dying, the Episcopal Church in particular. But I wonder if we are seeing what God may be doing. Now that the church is becoming post-Christian (i.e. less connected to empires and nation states), the opportunity is to participate in the healing of the divided church as well as the many divisions plaguing our entire world. You see, at **some points during Constantinian Christianity (that is, when the church married the Greco-Roman empire) the church was not very wise . . . was not seeking after God and was more interested** in power, control and dominion. So, we would be wise in seeing how God's ways are not always our ways. That the decline of mainline religion may not be so much a curse and instead more of a blessing. What we may be seeing as scarcity is really the opportunity of participating in a more authentic church that is not defined by power, control and dominion but by wisdom thirst for God.

One of the blocks to wisdom is scarcity thinking. Jesus demonstrates this problem in our Gospel today. Those who are wise know how to think more abundantly. The wise know that the one with the most options wins. Caught in binaries and either/or conflicts restricts wisdom to scarcity thinking . . . restricts us to our reptilian brains of flight or flight.

Scarcity thinking can easily move in the direction of thinking that there really is no God. Which to me is the ultimate scarcity—namely, thinking there is no God. As the Psalmist states, “The fool has said, “There is no God.” When we give into this way of thinking that there is no God, we do foolish things.

In King David's empire, David set one of his soldiers, Uriah, on the front line of battle in order to have him killed. David did this in the foolishness to take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. (An aside here, the irony in David's foolishness and Bathsheba's tragedy is that later, after God judges David's foolishness, David and Bathsheba give birth to the one most known for the opposite of foolishness, King Solomon.) Immediately after David's foolishness, however, God sends a prophet named Nathan to David.

In the wisdom tradition, Nathan tells David a moral story:

There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a guest to the rich man, and the rich man was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but the rich man took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.

David, naively, responded to Nathan's story. David became irate at the injustice. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Nathan reminds David of David's own words, "As the Lord lives". Obviously, in David's actions the Lord was not living. There was no God in his actions. David had become lazy—one day rising from an afternoon nap seeing a beautiful woman, has her husband killed and takes her as his own. The King is above the law. The King is on par with God. This was David's unacknowledged sin.

Nathan tells David the moral of the story, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

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Like David discovers when the scales fall from his eyes, I wonder if we are seeing what God may be doing to break the way of scarcity in our own lives. David by his sinful behaviors did not appreciate the abundance of God but lived in a resentful world of taking the one precious lamb away from the poor man. How do we avoid the lack of belief in God that leads to foolishness and tragedy?

In the wisdom tradition of answering a question by asking a question, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the

kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:1-6)

One of the blocks to wisdom is scarcity thinking. A child has no such thinking. The world is a child's oyster. A child is full of wonder. Jesus demonstrates this in our Gospel today. Those who are wise know how to think more abundantly. The wise know that the one with the most options wins. Caught in binaries and either/or conflicts restrict wisdom to scarcity thinking . . . restricts us to our reptilian brains of fight or flight.

In today's Gospel of John we have the account of the miracle of fish and loaves. But it is really a story about a humble child who is often missed in the story. This child in our Gospel lesson is unique in that the boy brings forward the fish and loaves, not the disciples.

Children often teach adults how to have faith.

On the Logan Express that takes you for free from Logan Airport to downtown Boston, I noticed what seemed to be a married couple with a heavy load, boarding the bus. They had two large suitcases, some carry ons, a large stroller and the most important cargo was their infant daughter who seemed to be crying in slow motion. "Mi No Old" she seemed to cry.

I took out my laptop and proceeded to take notes on what was about to unfold. I don't know why but I felt the Holy Spirit telling me I would be wise in telling this story.

The father, an American of seemingly European descent kept handing his daughter his iPhone hoping to pacify this vibrant life on the bus. But the cry in slow motion reached its climax as the daughter adroitly deflected the phone and grabbed her father's shirt sleeve. The father in turn proceeded to the next step of scooping up the infant to hand his daughter to her mother. The mother, an American of seemingly Asian background deftly grabs her daughter's off hand twisting the infant into her lap like an Olympic wrestler would subdue an opponent. And yet, still to no avail "Mi No Old" continued to ring throughout the bus. Senior passengers limped on the bus and struggled to get their luggage aboard, struggled to by pass the mother and daughter. The daughter made her uninhibited presence known. Others could not pass the damn of two large suitcases in the way.

The infant, slipped the wrestler's knot her mother had her bound by and reached for her father, this time infant mimicked the sound of "ba, ba". Immediately both parents reached for the baby bottle hoping this would be the antidote. From the mother, the father swooped the baby over the seat rail and tried to assume the position of nourishment with the bottle. "Mi No Old" regurgitated and finally resumed to the original squall.

Being a father of three children myself, I tried to do my own diagnosis of the situation. I thought it was a mere lack of translation of "Mi No Old". I thought to myself with my arthritic shoulder acting up on the bus that what the infant was really saying was, "I am cold, darnit", put some

cover over me”, but I could not tell these parents my translation.. I was too much of a coward on a public bus to risk telling them my translation. After all, they were the parents and should be able translate their own child I thought to convince myself.

Suddenly, there was no squall, no scream as the infant propped a baby bottle full of nourishment in her mouth. The infant found abundant relief. Cuddled now back into her mother’s arms. There was no more need to translate. No more need of a stranger on the bus to help her out. The infant cuddled with her mother and fell asleep.