

Proper 11 Year C 2025

The great 20th Century theologian, Karl Barth, with whom I disagree... a lot said one thing with which I whole heartedly agree: "The preacher is to preach with the New York Times in one hand, and the bible in the other." It is the preacher's task, according to Barth, to relate scripture to current events, to our culture, and current context. So here is the proverbial New York times part of this sermon:

A Republic is defined, in short, as a political system governed, not by a king, but by the will of its people. We, my brothers and sisters, are witnesses to the demise of the United States as a republic. In terms of the future of our nation, there is no recovery from the cruel madness of the current administration which is systematically dissolving our 250 year old democracy. The checks and balances of the three independent branches of government have been compromised. The final tolling of the bell was the Citizens United ruling by the Supreme Court whereby corporations were allowed to donate virtually unlimited funds, without disclosure, to political candidates. The proverbial will of the people has been subverted by the will of corporate interest. We should have seen this coming.

At the collapse of the American economy in 1929, the so-called Great Depression, the leadership of our nation was forced to take stock as to a sustainable direction of not only the economy, but the government's role, if any, in protecting the nation from economic collapse. Capitalism, the economic ideal of this country, a philosophy birthed during the Enlightenment, embraced by the Republic, revealed its Achilles heel in 1929;

that it was susceptible to greed, and that it favored disproportionately the economic elite; and that, unchecked, it was unsustainable. Karl Marx's critique of Capitalism some 75 years earlier, was on point, that Capitalism, on its own, would disenfranchise the poor and the working class; that it showed disproportionate favor towards the wealthy and powerful. He called it an immoral system.

Under the administration of Franklin Roosevelt the New Deal was instituted to save the economy.... Not without controversy. Some characterized it as communism, but in fact, the new Deal was an ingenious system that placed into partnership the economy with government. Control was placed on investment and banking practices; the feeble economy was infused with government cash for jobs and pensions. Collective bargaining by workers was sanctioned by legislation. The government launched a massive plan for the building of infrastructure, roads, bridges; which created meaningful employment for millions of unemployed citizens.... So, yes... Capitalism; but with the aid and oversight of a government whose authority came ultimately from the people.... Philosophically, the economy was a marriage between Marxist egalitarianism and free enterprise, the cornerstone of Capitalism. For almost five decades this partnership gave us a progressive tax structure, Social Security, subsidized housing, food stamps, fair lending practices, Medicare and Medicaid. During this time, the middle class grew more than at any time in our economic history. Some say the New Deal, in fact, created the American Middle Class. It's my opinion that the economic possibilities of the New deal

for people of color, sowed the seeds of hope and resolve for the Civil Rights movement... which some would say was the zenith of our democratic capabilities.

All this began to unravel at the election of Ronald Reagan. Reagan was the voice of the back-lash against the socialist democratic ethos of previous Democratic administrations. The Red scare led by Joe McCarthy in the 1950's was something of a first warning of a back-lash; but Reagan gave it institutional credibility. Reagan famously coined and promoted the "trickle-down theory," which held that enriching the wealth of the elites, both corporate and individual, that that wealth would somehow find its way into the wallets of the poor and the working class. Since the early nineteen eighties the economic policies and guardrails of the New Deal have been eviscerated systematically, thereby leaving a Capitalist economy unchallenged, uncontrolled, unbridled. The economy now owns our elected representatives, Republicans and Democrats alike, as they are beholden to the vast resources of corporations that fund their campaigns, and buy their legislative votes. Our government is crumbling in the face of a new, plutocratic order, a capitalist autocracy, if you will. We are now an economic empire, a profit center, no longer a republic. A citizen is an economic unit. What is true, is what always has been true.... Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The American dream was just that... a dream... a naïve dream... and now for many of us in this country, it is becoming a nightmare from which there is no waking up.... That's where I think we are... and I'm convinced that there will be no reclaiming the way things used to be. How do we live in such a world? Here is the bible part:

How we live in such a world is the question upon which Jesus based his life and ministry. His world, too, languished under the aegis of tyranny, coercion, and violence. Jesus's teaching was not so much about changing the world, as it was about how we live in the world. The Kingdom of God, for Jesus and the movement he led, was not a utopian end when all things are set right. The kin-dom of God was about living with integrity, meaning, and purpose in the world as it is. In other words, Jesus taught that Life... abundant life, is possible in a marginalizing world controlled by the powerful. This short passage in Luke which we just read, gives us a clue as to the means of making our way in such a world. A few verses earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has sent his disciples out two by two into the mission field... healing the sick; caring for the poor. He tells them to seek out hospitality along the way. And in our reading today: It is a scene marked by hospitality. Mary and Martha of Bethany host Jesus and presumably some of his disciples. Martha, we are told is worn out from her "many tasks." It's a poor translation. The actual translation for "many tasks" in the Greek, is "much ministry." In fact, the word translated in our reading for tasks is diakonos, the word from which we get the word deacon (servant; and an ancient order in the church; still an order in the church). Martha was distracted because of "much ministry." I can't imagine what the NRSV translators were thinking... because rather than a quaint domestic scene involving two spinsters cooking supper for the Lord, these are two disciples taking a break with their mentor because ministry is exhausting work. So many commentators sentimentalize this scene... Mary, batting her eyes hanging on every word spoken by

Jesus sitting at his feet. No... Mary is just chilling out; talking things over. I imagine Jesus too is worn out from much ministry. Martha is still wired, still in a doing mode; and Jesus reminds her to rest, refresh. It's a long road. Ministry is about serving, and feeding, in every sense of that word... but, in ministry we must also be served, and we must also be fed, both literally and metaphorically. Such is the nature of hospitality... host becomes guest and guest becomes host... all are fed, nurtured for the way ahead. We'll see this dynamic again in Luke, when the two disciples meet the stranger on the road... and then they realize it is the risen Jesus at a meal... in the context of hospitality. Hospitality is where heaven meets earth.

Hospitality engenders community; and it widens the circle of community; it includes those who are left out of the circle; and it is in community that we find life, and life abundant. In our own ambiguous history, it was community that made possible the civil rights movement. In the present calamity of tyranny, it will be community that will sustain life and life abundant. The life blood of our world pulses in community. The whole greater than the sum of its parts; and we trust that the life begotten in each and every community of good will and conscience, will ramify into the collective consciousness of our world. At least, that it may be a witness to a broken world that a life of well-being and dignity is possible.

Hospitality nurtures relationships, and it is in relationship that God lives and moves among us. Perhaps the world will change one day. The prophets tell us so. Mary's

Song at the beginning of Luke's Gospel proclaims as much. That may be... but the future is only a dream. We dear friends are called into the now. Our community, ever evolving, widening, is and will be our strength; and when we are worn out having lived much ministry; when we, ourselves, have been eaten and drunk by the world's least and lost... there is nurture among us; always among us... rest and restoration and healing for our bodies and souls... and renewed hope, renewed purpose, that the tyranny of the world cannot touch.

I am afraid that what we have known as our democracy is lost. But we will not fear, for we will never lose each other. Our God is with us and for us... and God is life and Love.... The powers and principalities of our world will pass away, but Love and life will endure forever.