

Proper 17 year C 2025

Our city elections were held this past Tuesday. In the mayoral election Barbara Drummond got the most votes among the four candidates. She will be in a run-off with Spiro Cheriogotis later in September. If elected, Ms. Drummond would be the first Black female ever elected mayor of Mobile. In fact, she would be the first woman ever elected mayor in Mobile. Now that we are in the age of social media, this historic moment in Mobile politics, however, is being tainted by a huge public outcry from the racist culture in which we live. Here are just a sample of these comments on Facebook: "If Barbara Drummond wins she'll steal the city blind." "Barbara Drummond is incompetent, and will run an already failing city into the ground." "Mobile is about to become another Prichard. Give it to them. I'm moving to Baldwin County." One commenter associated Drummond with the Prichard Water Board scandal, calling her corrupt. There are hundreds of such comments. As to racism and systemic segregation, we have a long way to go in this city.

Some of you, if you are old enough like me, know the term "blue-blood." I heard it used just this past week. It of course refers to people of a noble and sophisticated class of society. The term was coined in Spain in the twelfth century. The so-called nobility, the wealthy of the country, didn't perform manual labor, the majority of which was farming and tending livestock. The laborers tended to have darker skin from exposure to the sun, whereas the nobility had pale skin through which one would notice their blue veins. Not so noticeable if your skin were darker.

So you were a so-called “blue-blood” if you were wealthy, being exempt from manual labor... and white. The term appears throughout Europe and the United Kingdom in the late eighteenth century... and of course, it made its way to America. And moreover, the term has also been associated with genetics... that is to say, that one inherits the attributes of nobility via their genetic make-up; that the right to high society is determined by our very DNA.

The point I want to make is that racism, our latent and insidious xenophobia, in league with our insatiable pursuit of wealth, and thus power, are doing us in... creating, over centuries, a caste system, which by definition is a system of injustice. Over the centuries, the ignoble hierarchy of wealth and class has created intractable systems of injustice and shame. I would argue that the violence that has so plagued humankind over the millennia, ultimately is due to wealth and power, and to our willful fear of the other. Our own culture, our own country is a case in point. Racism has been termed America’s Original Sin. It demeans and abuses indiscriminately our sisters and brothers of color.... And now we see our democracy in shambles as our government has become mere infrastructure for the personal accumulation of wealth by an elite cohort of criminals. The sharing of the vast wealth of this country, a goal set out in the New Deal under Roosevelt, has reversed. The middle class is disappearing; poverty is increasing exponentially... and yet the United States remains the wealthiest nation in the world. Capitalism is no longer curated by a benevolent

invisible hand; not that it ever was; it is now overtly the iron hand of insatiable greed. This calamitous trend will continue. But it has forever been this way. For civilization after civilization, wealth and power corrupt. There are no exceptions. So what shall we do as people who seek to practice the way of Jesus up and against such moral failings.... The way of Jesus... a way that is in every way, opposed to such corruption. Are we naïve? Are we powerless?

Eschatology is a fancy word among theologians that has to do with the so-called “end times.” Literally, the word means “knowledge of the end.” The genre of eschatology as it pertains to scripture emerged during the second century B.C.E. when Israel was under heightened oppression by the Assyrians. The doctrine asserted that there will be a time in the future that the Son of Man will come to the earth and set things right in dramatic fashion, accompanied by earthquakes and clouds of glory. The church over the centuries has made a living on such theology, in effect, deferring the promise of salvation to an apocalyptic future, perhaps because of the recognition that the world as it is, a world of greed and violence and oppression and poverty intractably remains the same. That is why the church, over its history, has opted for the emphasis on life after death. This life is a veil of tears, while heaven will be the time and place that salvation will come about. The church abdicated the proclamation that salvation was at hand, and opted for a future utopian fantasy, beyond the life we know.

But Jesus's teachings, according to each of the four Gospels, were not about the future. Jesus taught about the urgent imminence of God's kingdom; the presence of God's reign in earth in the here and now... a community of equals eternally present in the face of the world's ruin. We have been reading this year from Luke's Gospel; and as you know the theme of this Gospel is articulated in the prologue in the voice of Mary, Jesus's mother. She proclaims a great social, political, and economic reversal of the world's hierarchical system; the raising up of the poor and the outcast... and this proclamation is expressed in the present tense. Salvation is for now, not for the end of time.

In our reading from Luke appointed for today, the writer transforms Mary's macrocosmic imaginings into a particular way of living. He invites the end times into the present day, recognizing that the past is selective memory; and the future is mere illusion. The present time is the thing. The image is of a meal, perhaps metaphorical, perhaps literal, or both; a meal being the most intimate, the most sacred practice of community. Luke describes a meal at which there is no class; a gathering of equals whose commonality is founded upon the shared need for nurture and fellowship. A meal is an event at which all are intimately present, proximate. One's hopes, one's dreams... one's story are just as present at a meal as the nurture. It is a gathering of souls. At a meal people are seen, really seen.... Perhaps a better word is recognized. A meal begets the recognition of our common humanity. You'll

remember that later in Luke the disciples recognize the risen Jesus at the breaking of the bread. A meal, in its celebratory ritual, manifests a host of life-giving virtues... virtues that make us truly human... virtues like hospitality and welcome; generosity; humility and gratitude. A meal is a consummate symbol of justice: Everyone partakes in equal portion. Thus, our tables are altars upon which the sacrifice of our lives and labor are celebrated. Meals are passing events in which the kingdom, fully present, hums with mystery. Mundane elements of earth transformed into nurture; hearts kindled by recognition; communion with the other, in whose face we apprehend the divine. There are other meals shot through this Gospel.

Luke is making the case that the kingdom of God is not a future event. The world I suspect will remain much the way it is. There will be triumphs of justice; and there will be harrowing episodes of injustice. The future is simply ours not to know. The world will always strain between beauty and horror. But here, now, the kingdom of God is manifest wherever people gather in Love, and the sacrifice love engenders. The blood in our veins is quite literally the life of God. All of us of the same blood. All of us kin in marvelous diversity. The kingdom of God is wherever community is manifest... a community of invitation to all who will come, and the community is not whole and complete until the ones left out of the circle are invited in. The untouchables of our world, the outcasts, the shamed... they share our blood. God's kingdom is the very process of community living its vocation of welcome. Perhaps

our gathering in Love informs the greater whole. Perhaps our gathering in sacred hospitality is the planting of the seeds of Love. Who knows how those seeds may grow? Who knows whose life may be warmed by a gracious invitation? The world groans in agony, but still we gather at God's table of abundance and we proclaim God's kingdom now in our midst, setting its roots amid the world's ruin. I believe that that is enough for now... because, sisters and brothers, now is all we have.