

Easter VII Year A 2026

I receive regular emails from the Globe Theater in London. Four years ago before leaving on Sabbatical I bought tickets for Katharine and myself to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there. The theater is an exact replica of the original Globe that existed in Shakespeare's day. I'm on their list. So, I noticed recently that they were performing the *Tempest*, my favorite play by Shakespeare; so, while Katharine was away in Austin, I reread the play; and I started reading again Harold Bloom's exquisite book, a collection of essays on Shakespeare. The book's title is: *Shakespeare, the Invention of the Human*. As the title suggests, Bloom is proposing that the high art of language, particularly poetry, best represents who we are; language being the most profound measure of the complexities of culture: words being symbols of our collective interior and communal life;... I am reminded of the poet Gregory Orr's audacious phrase, "let's remake the world with words." A testimony to the human imagination. Indeed, words have the power to shape reality... Other scholars besides Bloom argue that Shakespeare is the inventor of modern English; that his cosmology, his philosophy, his world-view, is still far ahead of its time; still informs us. Our Prayer book, and many of our hymns owe much to Shakespeare's genius.... "In the beginning was the Word."

So please allow me to go all English Major on you.... Poetry, good poetry, can't come into being without authenticity, embracing the whole of life's experience... the dark and the light, joy and pain, despair and hope... Poetry more than anything else is honest. It finds its resonance in speaking the truth about life's mystery... love and loss, sorrow and joy, death and

rebirth. To work, it must hold in artful tension the paradoxical complexities of life. Its irony. It must be comfortable in ambiguity; in speculation; in things being unresolved... a lot like the life of faith.... Among the myriad explanations having to do with the nature of life on earth, perhaps it is poetry that gets closer to the truth more than other art forms or disciplines. It is the language of the imagination; the language of mystery that so connects us to the poetic mind of God... Life itself, the created order entire, moves to the rhythm of poetry, I think; the rhythm of the imagination, curious and visionary and courageous....

So, we are continuing our readings from John's gospel... We will finish next week, at Pentecost, for the time being, and we will resume our readings from the gospel of Matthew. So, let's recollect what we know about this gospel.... It is the latest gospel to be written, probably early second century. It is of course markedly different from the so-called synoptic gospels, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those gospels are narrative action and classical rhetoric... that is, they seek to move their hearers to do something... they are exhortations to action... and though John's gospel is in many ways rhetorical, it is first and foremost a philosophical treatise as to the identity of Jesus, a thirty thousand feet view, as it were, and moreover a treatise on the identity of those who follow Jesus... it is an imaginatively cosmic view of life in earth; and what I want to say this morning is that this gospel uses the language of poetry.... The language of imagination and mystery... honest, trustworthy... It is not a prescribed set of beliefs to which we must assent; it is an expression of beauty, that is to say mystery.... The mystery of who Jesus of Nazareth is, and the mystery of who we are as

followers of Jesus. To experience mystery is not so much to acquire esoteric knowledge; it is more the experience of the intensity of self.... The calling card of mystery is intensity.

So remember the prologue: My paraphrase: In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God... nothing has been created, invented, except through this Word/ God... and this word/ God is very much like light, the light of the world no less... and the light of the world is the light of humanity... and this light-word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth... and then today we read from Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples: I am in them as you are in me.... they will bear my legacy to the world, just as I have revealed you to the world... they are one with you as you and I are one.

Jesus is not describing the world of humankind as fallen from grace... he is not describing a depraved race in need of rescue from the jaws of hell... quite the contrary. He is extolling the genius of humankind explicitly because of our capacity to love. And he makes the audacious claim that we are sent as he is sent; and moreover, that those who follow him will do greater things than he... The writer of John's gospel, like the other gospel writers is searching for a way for us to live in the face of the world's complexities; in the face of the paradox of existence... A way to embrace the poetry of life... symbols, twists of phrase, hidden meaning; enigma... dark and light, sorrow and joy, hope and despair, birth and death, good and evil.... The poetry of John gathers the paradox in its arms and makes the bold statement of faith that it is love that can bear the paradox... not love a mere emotion, but love that gives without ceasing; love for John is the capacity to befriend, that all-important word; love that is

sacrifice for the other; love that bears burdens; love that persists and exults in the good, and love that stands against evil; love that can bear and endure the intense poetry of creation... bear it, and redeem it; love that makes and remakes the creation in beauty, despite the evil that weighs so heavily on our world.

Speaking of the world; the news of our world in the present day is not so good. In a world with abundant resources the rich are getting richer, while poverty is on the increase even in our own country, the wealthiest nation on earth. The powerful, as they have done for millennia, lord their power over the powerless. Capitalism, the economic engine of Modernity, has betrayed us. Now unbridled from its moral genesis, it has fallen victim to the designs of envy and greed. Our own government has become infrastructure for the profit motives of global corporations... and it seems there is no turning back. Violence is begotten of envy and greed. Indeed, in the 250 years that we have existed as a republic, our nation has been marked by violence, at home and abroad... even against our own citizens. And now violence by our own government has become institutionalized, a profit center for the military industrial complex. The American dream was just that... a dream fueled by the propaganda of greed and prideful exceptionalism. The American empire is crumbling, as is our naiveté. But we, brothers and sisters belong to God's reign. We are called, not unlike our brother Jesus, to befriend the world. Our rubric is not profit, the service of self. We live under the auspices of Love... and Love is stronger than greed and envy and armaments. And Love will not crumble. Love will endure. It thrives in paradox.

I shall say it again: We brothers and sisters are not here to believe rightly. We are not here to fully understand. Fundamentalist Christianity's most grievous offense is that it seeks to demystify the faith; to make it a certainty, and to some extent that has been true over the church's history... .. But faith is uncertain. It smacks of mystery.... It is not about ends; it is about means.... It is not about a particular trajectory or goal, but it is about process..... a process poetic. We are here as witnesses in our practice, to God's love alive among us... that is our vocation, our sole reason for living. That is Incarnation. Incarnation didn't just happen in a magical moment in history. God didn't enter the world at a particular time and place. God is our world; and we are of God, since the very beginning. Incarnation is simply the process of God's people acting for the good. Love is the soul of God incarnate. The poetry of this gospel teaches us that Love is at the heart of the matter.... It is love that creates all things, and it is love that will restore all things; John speaks singularly of it, as befriending; laying down one's life for the beloved.... In the poetic fabric of creation there is surely fear, and anger, and envy, and violence, and greed and suffering... there is racism and homophobia. There is exclusion and elitism... Our xenophobic tendencies have resurfaced yet again, perhaps as virulent as ever, dredged up from the ancient memory in our DNA... How shall we live in the world of humans?.... The poetry of this gospel proposes an answer: It is love, because love is stronger than all of these things... nothing can quench love, nothing can outlast it... that is what we call the good news! So ours is to persist in love; persist in the practice of hospitality, and kindness,

and forgiveness... we are to persist in our stand against evil; we are to persist in doing justice in the world...

The oneness for which Jesus prays is not that we all subscribe to a uniform belief system ... "Father help them get it right!" No.... The oneness for which Jesus prays is a committed solidarity with the broken and burdened of our world; justice the means. We are to live lives of advocacy for the voiceless... John calls the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. We are advocates until we are one voice in solidarity for the Good. This is what resurrection is all about... we miss its meaning if we believe that it is a once upon a time miracle some two thousand years ago... resurrection life is the persistence of love that will raise up all people and all things into the oneness of dignity and well-being... It is the true light that the darkness will never overcome... Dare we believe that?.... Dare we put such poetry into practice.

Dear people of God, live the poem; live the well-wrought Word sprung from the one light.... Stand artfully, as poets, prophets, in the midst of life's struggle and tension... live true to your birthright... You were, shall we say, invented for such as this.... We were invented for true humanity... act as if Love is the true way. Trust the poem... that is the prayer Jesus on the night before his death prayed for us... That we may be one with our God, of like mind, of like purpose; of the same sensibility... and with a passion for God's people who suffer within life's mysterious paradox... That is poetry indeed... A word... still speaking; honest and true and worthy of our trust.... and humming with mystery.