

Proper 18 Year A 2026

Some of you may remember Rob Gray. Rob was a member of All Saints some ten years ago, until he and his family moved to Norway where he would take a teaching position at the University of Bergen. Some of you will remember the award winning documentary he directed and produced called *Mobile in Black and White* which chronicled the systemic racism of Mobile and the South in general. Rob is a musician, a social commentator, a filmmaker.... An obsessed Alabama football fan... an accomplished poet, and a dear friend. He is also adept in matters of technology, matters utterly beyond my grasp. He's written essays on the AI phenomenon; its practical use in pedagogy, and its dangers.

Just this past week Rob posted an email to his friends group an analysis of one of his poems by Chat GBT, one of the many emerging AI platforms on the internet. On a whim, he posted his poem, "The Day I was Born" and simply instructed Chat GBT to analyze it. What he received was a five page interpretation... and I have to admit, it was scary good; thorough, detailed, dare I say... knowledgeable. The poem is about being born into the racist ethos of the South, and how such a birthright affects our common life. Chat GBT, in its analysis gave a concise and accurate history of the civil rights struggle in Alabama. It went on to discuss the poet's moral quest for empathy, his prophetic naming of evil

that passes for normality; his ambiguous love for his home in the South; his wistful, if not naive hope, for a new and moral and just order. Perhaps it was just me, but I sensed an odd enthusiasm in the analysis. It was unsettling, scary.... But something was amiss. Does AI have a moral conscience? Does AI possess consciousness? Does AI have access to the collective human imagination? Is AI a friend to humanity? I suppose we shall see. And, of course we know that AI is driving our economy. It is the new and improved engine of American Capitalism. And such an economy will continue to favor principally the economic elite, faceless corporations, the tech billionaires. And this new economy is not one that produces jobs... quite the contrary. It will replace jobs. Data centers are being built around the country to support the AI platforms, scarring the landscape, in support of AI's voracious appetite for energy. Data Centers use massive amounts of electricity and water, thus creating a high demand for utilities that are becoming increasingly unaffordable. These AI Data centers are not environmentally friendly. Don't doubt that this so-called innovation is, at its heart, about profit. As American capitalism becomes the insatiable monster it was prophesied to be... and as it has merged with government, technology has become its exponential enabler. Profits from this technology don't trickle down to the population; they rise into the hands of the powerful. Greed is the henchman

of power... and envy, our original sin; that is to say: wanting what someone else has... envy is the engine of greed. We see that dynamic playing out before our very eyes in our own place and time. We should not be surprised.

In the greater scheme, the grand scheme of our common life, technology, it seems to me, is contributing to more and more isolation. We meet by Zoom; we extoll “distance learning” (my new favorite oxymoron); People “work from home.” We seek and give counsel amid sweat pants and pajamas and bad breath. Now, I don’t want to be that old curmudgeon railing against change and progress, (get off my lawn!) but human communication and connection is a bodily thing. It is meant not only for our engaged attention, but also for our physical presence.... One can often miss the point on line. There’s no body language on line.... On line, it’s easier to be less than honest. On line we are less of who we are. I’m convinced that the isolation among us empowers and yields to a broken system. Without a unified voice of critique; a unified voice of ideas; without the collective voice of the human imagination, the system under which we live becomes closed and exclusive amid the devices and desires of elite power.

Things never change. Matthew, writing in the late first century, is calling out the abusive and violent system under which his people live. Economically the

empire is profiting from the resources of the region at the dire expense of the local population... crops are confiscated by the empire and sold to foreign markets; taxation is crippling for the local population... That's how empires work. Just ask the people of Latin America, the indigenous populations of North America, the people of Africa. Matthew's sustainable solution, as always is community. Throughout his Gospel, embodied in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew's exhortation is for the faithful to give themselves to open communities in which wealth and resources are shared; in which people live as equals with respect and dignity. That's what the feeding of the five thousand story is all about... the critical mass of community that denies scarcity and chooses to nurture the poor and the hungry; that welcomes the outcast and the immigrant... For Matthew that is Love.... Love that is exponential, in the face of the exponential greed of empire. His premise: The will of community is unvanquishable.

In our reading for today Jesus is calling his followers to community, into the critical mass of connection and discernment. Because, he says, that God is in the midst of community... "where two or three are gathered I am in their midst," he says. When we are present to each other, God inhabits that presence, and thus Love is present, and Love ramifies, crosses boundaries, accepts the unacceptable,

stands against the structures that oppose it. We give ourselves to community, not just for our own well-being, but for the well-being of our world, because in community we are witnesses to what Love can accomplish; what living for the truth can do. Falsehood has no power over the truth. Envy and greed have no power over generosity and compassion. Such virtues are engendered by our very gathering as God's people. In other words, our gathering invokes God's very presence. And Jesus is also speaking of authority, the authority of community... what you bind in earth is bound in Heaven... that is authority... and authenticity.... And a profound responsibility.

I have to believe that salvation is not only about our neighbor who suffers, but also about the healing of broken systems under which we live that cause such suffering. That is why we speak out in critique. We stand up for what is good and true. Dare I say it again... Our faith is a public faith. Our faith is witness to what is possible in the life of God. And our voice is of the highest authority. Don't doubt that. And particularly in these end times, we dare not keep silent. Let's not fall into the trap of believing that our allegiance to the radically compassionate way of the Gospel is just an opinion in contention with other opinions. You know: The "both sides" thing. We belong to just one side... the side of the Gospel of Jesus. The side of the truth. And we serve and proclaim that truth.

My sisters and brothers, we are the imaginative voice of generosity, of compassion, of justice. The artificial intelligence of our world trembles in the presence of it. We are not first a people of data... we are people of soul and spirit, of vision, of imaginative proclamation. We bear the capacity to recognize the beautiful. We weep with the suffering; we exult with the joyful. Such is not quantifiable. Our humanity hums with mystery. Ours is the voice that will move the mountains of deceit and envy and greed. What was true then is true now... that we live for the good of all. Like those who came before us, the community of faithful souls, we seek to serve Christ in all people; we stand against the evil in our world; we heal, we welcome. We tell the truth. The divine life bequeathed to us by our God confounds analysis. It is mystery, not known, but deeply felt, that so draws us into the heart of God... and no intelligence, artificial or otherwise knows better.