

The rests between the phrases

Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

A number of years ago, I was privileged to do a class on the Gospel of John with a man whose name was Paul Trudinger. And Paul started the class by saying that the Gospel of John is like a painting by Marc Chagall. I've had these Chagall prints in my office pretty much ever since as a reminder that when we look at the Gospel, we sometimes have to look inside the words.

A friend of Marc Chagall said to him at one point as they were standing in a hotel room overlooking the city, and it was a beautiful scene – it was one of those nighttime scenes. It was probably in Paris, because after all, all the great painters end up in Paris at some point. And they were looking out over this street that was teeming with people and the lights of the city were on and there were folks sitting at tables having a café au lait and discussing the day's events, and his friend said to him: "Marc, for heaven's sake, why don't you paint that? Now that's real."

And Marc said, "Oh no. No no no. What's real is what's going on inside the lives of those people having café au lait. That couple may be in the midst of a conversation about bringing new life into the world. Those lights shining from that apartment? Inside that apartment are people having dinner. They may be chasing their children all over, trying to round them in. That couple walking down the street no longer holding hands? There's probably a disagreement going on there. That's what I try to paint. I try to paint the emotional lives of what's going on inside the relationships."

And so we end up with, who knows what all that's intended to say? Who knows? What we do know is that we come naked to the world, and naked we will leave this world. Who knows? Chagall had a thing for having roosters and having violinists. And old men – he had a thing about old men. That was probably because he was a man. And rams – he put one or more of those symbols into each. They each symbolize something for him and with his death we lost what each of those symbols might have been.

Well, so too with John. The Gospel writer John wrote in symbols. He didn't just put out there what everyone else had been saying. He put out things like: "The Holy One gives you true bread." It's up to us. You sort out, I sort out what the true bread is. He said things like: "If you come to me, you'll never be hungry or thirsty." He didn't mean that you go through your days never needing a drink of water. He meant something deeper that's behind the words.

To maybe be a little more expressive of this, my friends, I've chosen one of my favourite hymns. (I know I say that with every one of them.) it's "In the Quiet Curve of Evening". We're gonna sing a verse, we're gonna take a minute to think about that verse reflect on the verse. We're gonna sing another verse. It's gonna be our sermon; you're gonna remain seated. I'll stand up here and do what I can to lead you through. It's "In the Quiet Curve of Evening"; it's Voices United 278. It's also on your order of service.

In the quiet curve of evening
In the sinking of the day
In the silky void of darkness

You are there

In the lapses of my breathing
In the space between my ways
In the crater carved by sadness
You are there

You are there
You are there
You are there

I invite you to consider the lapse in your breathing. What is in that split second? That, my friends, is what I believe John is attempting to point us to. John is pointing us to the fact that the Holy One is even there. And that the bread that comes from heaven is that split second in which God dwells. But not just there – have you ever been in the silky void of darkness, my friends? Being a southern Saskatchewanian I got that a few times. Because there would be nights where there were no stars and where if you stepped outside, you were in utter, total, complete darkness. It's for me a very compelling space. It always led me into me, rather than into fear. Or the crater carved by sadness; I'm gonna guess that many of us in this room know that crater very well. The crater that we hope we will fill with tears, but we know never will be. The emptiness we feel, the loss of an important person, an important relationship, and important job, an important pet. The hole into which we ourselves hope we will not fall. We won't, because God's already filled that hole. The Holy One is already there. Just like the Holy One is in the rests between the phrases and the cracks between the stars – verse two.

In the rests between the phrases
In the cracks between the stars
In the gaps between the meaning
You are there

In the melting down of endings
In the cooling of the Sun
In the solstice of the winter
You are there

You are there
You are there
You are there

The Gospel of John and I think this piece of music exists for those of us who don't like the concrete but are happier with the ethereal in some ways. I like life to be clearly defined sometimes, but I am also far happier living inside questions than have people tell me answers. And I don't ever want to be in the position where I have to tell people answers, because I'll say, "I don't know". Because it's God who knows. It is the Holy One's place to be in the rests between the phrases and the cracks between the stars. It is the Holy One's place to be the bread. To be the water. And so, this day is for those for whom music and poetry makes abundant sense as we sing in the mystery of my hungers and in the silence of my wounds – verse three.

In the mystery of my hungers
In the silence of my wounds

In the cloud of my unknowing
You are there

In the empty cave of grieving
In the desert of my dreams
In the tunnel of my sorrow
You are there

You are there
You are there
You are there

The Gospel is not all about giving clear directions; the Gospel is instead an invitation into a depth of our soul that we often leave unexplored and that we often know at some point that we yearn for but aren't sure how to get there. Marc Chagall tried, the Gospels try, the author of "In the Quiet Curve of Evening" has given us a route. Those are the people who have a sense of our leadership into the depth of our soul that sometimes, I believe, we just let go in the busyness of life. And so today, we have an opportunity to take a minute and just stop. Just stop from the busyness of life and give thanks that there is bread. There is water. There is friendship. There is music. And that leads us back to you, Erin. This time you're on your own, my dear.