

St Catherine's Day

November 24th, 2019

Here, is our powerful stranger.

Do not be afraid.

Second Reading: Revelations 21:5-7

John's vision shows us a new age has dawned, where God dwells with us. So we wait for the time when the tears that cloud our vision will be wiped away. Then we will see the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem.

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Reader: Let us hear what the Spirit is saying.

All: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 10:28-33

Jesus warns his disciples that their ministry will meet with opposition. However, he assures them that they need not fear for the truth will come to light. Life is found in Christ.

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Presider: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

People: Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted.

So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Presider: The Gospel of Christ.

People: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

At our Wednesday reflective service, we brought into our awareness the image of a tiny bird, fallen from her nest, and rescued from the neighborhood cats below the tree. When you hold the bird gently in your hands, you can palpably sense the bird's fear - wide-eyed with a thumping racing heartbeat.

Do not fear. Jesus' words to his friends, who were about to face the social, political and religious opposition of 1st Century Palestine. The very opposition that led to Jesus' death. In every moment in our lives we are offered two rooms – one of love – a place where we recognize our belovedness and trust. And the other a room of fear.

Every moment, each time we say hello to the present, to here, to now, to this... there are things we would rather not have to face.

And yet by turning to what is before us, there is much to learn.

And so I turn to the wisdom of a poem by David Wagoner:

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost.
Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger.

In the Shelter, Padraig O Tauma

St Catherine's this moment in our history, is rich with blessings. There are many things **here**. There is a weekly rhythm in this place that is rich with people who inhabit this space. Rich in community. And each person who enters this building brings with them imagination, wonder, excitement, energy, life, gifts.

And there are some things in this moment, some things **here**, that are scary for us. Facing the question of relevance, the question of making room for others, that leads to fear. It is for us a powerful stranger. Something new, something strange, that has an invitation for us. One that might bring a sense of fear. And if we, hold out, with compassion and gentleness, one that could lead to our transformation. A gift of newness, from the spring of the water of life... (Revelation 21).

Fear has deep roots. Usually in past experiences.

I remember in 2011, I was working part time with a good friend of mine and we had founded a not for profit that facilitated faith communities to support mental health recovery. My friend had announced that she was moving to another city. I was faced with the decision of whether I would step up into the position of Executive Director or not.

I was taking an afternoon nap one Wednesday afternoon. My anxiety was high, I remember feeling my heart pounding in my throat.
And then a wave of peace filled my body, and I heard in my heart the words: Sharon: I want more from you. And it's like I knew that I could the job.
Obviously the journey forward was a rollercoaster of fear and courage.
And yet, I am a different person because I said yes to Sanctuary.

Today we remember St Catherine. As Anglicans we remember people who forged a path in showing us a way of following Christ. Now there are many ways to follow. Each one of us is called to find our way to follow.

What St Catherine shows us, is what to do when we fear.
Parallel to the lives of the first disciples who were afraid.

St Catherine of Alexandria, whose feast day is tomorrow Nov 25th, was born in Alexandria in the late third century.

Her intelligence drew notice very early in her life. From a noble family, she pursued a course of studies and distinguished herself by her mastery of philosophy and science. She converted to Christianity after she experienced a vision, and she vowed her life to Christ and did not marry. She boldly attempted to convince Emperor Maximilian of Christianity's superiority to Roman paganism. The emperor was so impressed by Catherine that he pressed her to marry him but she refused.

He tried to have her torn apart on a torture rack and a breaking wheel. But the torture instruments fell apart. Leaving her unharmed. She was eventually beheaded.

And while this is a gruesome story – it is a story about fear and courage.

The call Jesus gives us to go beyond ourselves, even in (maybe especially) in the face of fear.

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.” (Franklin D Roosevelt).

To show love, to offer peace, to speak wisdom into places that are dark. That is what Jesus asks his friends to do.

And as we lean, as we trust, we experience moments of this mysterious deep life force of the renewing energy of the Spirit, found only in the now. Available in each eternal now, an invitation to make us new.

Thanks be to God.