

THE JOY OF SUNSHINE

June 20, 2010

Lessons Chosen in Recognition of the Summer Solstice

Genesis 1:14-19; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Luke 6:27-36

Three of my all-time favorite songs fall into the category of the sun. I grew up singing, “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are gray.” Then, when I taught myself the guitar in college and began to idolize John Denver, I learned to sing, “Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy. Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry. Sunshine on the water looks so lovely. Sunshine almost always makes me high.” Finally, when I started to look for a third song to fill out a trilogy of sunny songs, the obvious choice was “You are the sunshine of my life, that’s why I’ll always be around you.”

Given the lyrics of these songs, and many more like them, the sun often is identified as the source of happiness in our lives. For those of us who have had to endure the gray skies of this past spring, we can attest to the joy of seeing and feeling, and sometimes even tasting and smelling the sun. Although, I have to say that after living in L.A. for 5 years earlier in my life, I actually grew tired of waking up every morning to the same old sun, because I had been born and raised in the Pacific Northwest where the dynamic gray skies gave life to each new day, and the accompanying rain watered the very soul of my being. In fact, whenever the infrequent rain made its way to L.A., I would drive down the freeway as if I was in heaven, while everyone else crawled along at a snail’s pace, and grumbled about the effect of the rain on their harried life.

Of course, for anyone living in the desert, the scorching sun could be the kiss of death rather than the source of life and joy. In this regard, we all know that as the deserts continue to expand around the world and the glaciers continue to disappear at an alarming rate, the rays of the sun are becoming more deadly than life-giving because we continue to idolize the oil that makes us go round and round and up and down, and now threatens the life of tens of thousands of animal species throughout the Gulf of Mexico and beyond, not to mention the livelihood of tens of thousands of people who depend upon the creatures of the sea to put food on their own tables and feed their families.

As many of us who have had our faces carved up by dermatologists, we can attest to the lesson of bathing in too much sun even long before the rays of the sun were as compromised as they are today by the pollution of all of our carbon dioxide. However, the scars on our faces will be nothing in comparison to the loss of life in

the low lying regions of this planet if all of us do not begin to reduce our carbon footprints that continue to stomp out life wherever and whenever we choose to travel in our gas-guzzling machines in the air, on the road, and on the lake, as well as to rev them up to manicure our yards. No longer can we go out for a Sunday afternoon drive just for the heck of it without counting the cost to human and other animal life halfway around the world.

So, where does God fit into this whole picture of the sun being the source of both life and death, of both joy and sorrow? How does the witness of Jesus, as the image of God, teach us about the priorities of our lives and reveal to us the light of the knowledge of the glory God? How does God's Spirit continue to breathe new life into us so that we might be able to see the error of our foolish ways and be motivated to repent and turn back to God who is as merciful as anyone could ever be and who is willing to forgive all of us for the idolatries of our comfort, our convenience, our security, and our happiness that eventually will end life on this planet as we know it today?

Perhaps the teachings of Jesus today are a good place to start this discussion about what must happen in order to restore and recover the goodness of God's creation. "Love your enemies," Jesus says. Such a statement is so counter to the way that we are taught in this world about how to react to and treat people who are labeled as our enemies, whether or not we have had anything to say about how these people are identified. Besides, who even has to know who our enemies are when we can push a button in Alexandria, Virginia, and send a drone missile halfway around the world to kill our enemies, including thousands of innocent civilians?

With a President who has been intent on killing Osama bin Laden even before Obama was elected to office, any notion of doing good to someone who literally hates us is tossed out the window, and we are justified in limiting our goodness only for those who do good to us. Whereas we used to think that our continuing war against our enemies since 1991 was all about oil, only recently have we learned that killing our enemies these past 19 years really was about the iron, copper, cobalt, gold and lithium that recently were "discovered" in Afghanistan and are worth billions upon billions of dollars.

As the Apostle Paul makes reference today, we all are perishing because we not only fail to see the light, but we also refuse to let the light shine in our darkness—yes, in OUR darkness. Thankfully, we have a God who is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. I know that if I was God, I would be royally pissed off at the way that some of my children not only were treating my house,

but also were treating other members of my family who have as much right and privilege to live on this planet as we do. Let's face it, we all have gods of this world that blind our hearts and minds to the truth of God's love for all people, including our enemies, and that justify our desires to take what is mine and even what is theirs and be willing to kill those who despise and hate us for the way that we threaten everyone in the world with our first-strike capability.

When will we learn that if anyone strikes us in the heart of the Big Apple that we are to offer another apple of our eye to our enemy? Instead, what did we do when the terrorists attacked New York City? We pulled out our big guns and started shooting, and we are still shooting to this very day, not only in an attempt to destroy our enemy, but also expending so much fossil fuel in the process that we will never know the collateral damage that we have done to this earth as a result of our reactive and aggressive behavior. When will we learn to renounce the shameful things that we attempt to hide and want to deny so badly because we do not trust in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

This gospel of Jesus Christ has much more to do with our life in the here and now than it has to do with any form of afterlife. Besides, our life after death already is in the hands of a merciful God who will forgive all of our sins, and thereby save us. This merciful God did not create us for a life after death. God created us for a life of faithfulness and obedience here on earth where everyone can bask in the sun, enjoy the life that has been given to us, dwell in the love of God, and devote our lives to loving, doing good, blessing, and praying for everyone, including those who are our enemies because they also are the children of the Most High.

Some people refer to our enemies as being evil, thereby giving us the justification to go after them and kill them. However, Jesus claims that God is kind, even to the ungrateful and the wicked. Consequently, we are to be as merciful to those whom we label as such just as God is merciful to them and also to us, because in the hearts and minds of our enemies, we are the ungrateful, wicked and evil ones who think that we have the right and the might to rule over the day and the night. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that so much of what we are doing in this world is not good, no matter how justified or righteous we think that we are.

As people who are baptized in the name of Jesus, marked with the cross of Christ forever, and given a light to shine so that others may see the glory of God, we are called and chosen to be the image of Jesus Christ in this world, just as Jesus was commissioned by God and filled with the Holy Spirit to be the image of God in this world. I don't think that Jesus would have instructed us actually to love our

enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us if he did not think that such behavior was within the realm of our human capability, and beneficial for the salvation of the world.

However, we cannot fulfill these expectations on our own. We need help to love our enemies, just as we need help to forsake our love of the good life that is threatening the rest of the life on this planet that God created so very long ago. Jesus offers us this help by breathing on us God's Spirit just as God poured out the Holy Spirit on Jesus and filled Jesus with the authority and power to love his enemies, do good to those who hated him, bless those who cursed him, and pray for those who abused him. As a reflection of God's image on earth, Jesus was as merciful as God is merciful, because Jesus was filled with the peace and the power of God's Spirit—the same Spirit that Jesus gave us to fill our lives with God's love, joy and peace.

For those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, we are filled with this joy that is meant to brighten any day, no matter how gray the skies may be, because we know and believe that Jesus is the sunshine of our lives. As children who bask in God's love, are the recipients of God's mercy, and dwell in God's peace, we draw upon the Spirit of this Jesus for our inspiration and our motivation to let the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ shine in our lives and through our lives by being merciful to all others so that others may see the love, the mercy, the goodness, and the kindness of God and also become as merciful as God is merciful to each and every one of us on this planet Earth. Amen.

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