

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;
Peace on each one who comes in joy.
Peace on each one who offers prayers;
Peace on each one who offers song.
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.

Opening Prayer

Spirit of energy, Spirit of change, in whose power Jesus is anointed to be the hope of the nations: pour yourself also upon us, without reserve or distinction, that we may have confidence and strength to plant your justice on the earth, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Gospel

Luke 4:21-30

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue at Nazareth: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Poem: "The Earthquake Poem"

Go tell the earth to shake
And tell the thunder
To wake the sky

By Thomas Merton b. 1915

And tear the clouds apart.
Tell my people to come out
And wonder
Where the old world is gone,
For a new world is born,
And all my people
Shall be one.

So tell the earth to shake.
With marching feet
Of messengers of peace,
Proclaim my law of love
To every nation,
Every race.

For the old wrongs are over,
The old days are done;
A new world is rising
Where my people shall be one.

For the old world is ended,
The old sky is torn
Apart. A new day is born:
They hate no more,
They do not go to war anymore.
My people shall be one.

And say:
The old wrongs are over,
The old ways are done;
There shall be no more hate
And no oppression.
The old wrongs are gone,
My people shall be one.

Based on Isaiah 52

Meditation

In today's gospel, Jesus says "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is referring to a passage from Isaiah: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Prophets commonly encounter resistance, and even threats to their lives. The people who heard Jesus on this occasion were enraged and drove him out of town, apparently with an aim to hurl him off a cliff! Prophets may tell us difficult truths and challenge our beliefs and actions. Thomas Merton (1915-1968), a Trappist monk and poet whose life integrated contemplation with social activism, asserted that "a prophet is one who cuts through great tangled webs of lies."

Merton himself is often referred to as a prophet for the 21st century. One recent essay (by Victor Kramer) refers to Merton as a global prophet whose vision "invites all persons to embrace creation by employing a magnifying glass of compassion to ignite the ever-present rays of God's mercy." In his Earthquake Poem, Merton reimagines a passage from Isaiah in a way that makes it seem startlingly contemporary. This bold poem challenges us... even as it offers us great hope.

Questions for Reflection

What in the gospel story challenges or surprises you. What gives you hope?

What in the poem challenges or surprises you, and gives you hope?

Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

Poem and Reflections this month offered by: Frank Nowell