

Homily  
Trinity Sunday  
June 7, 2020  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Denver

Praise the Rain, by Joy Harjo

Praise the rain; the seagull dive  
The curl of plant, the raven talk—  
Praise the hurt, the house slack  
The stand of trees, the dignity—  
Praise the dark, the moon cradle  
The sky fall, the bear sleep—  
Praise the mist, the warrior name  
The earth eclipse, the fired leap—  
Praise the backwards, upward sky  
The baby cry, the spirit food—  
Praise canoe, the fish rush  
The hole for frog, the upside-down—  
Praise the day, the cloud cup  
The mind flat, forget it all—

Praise crazy. Praise sad.  
Praise the path on which we're led.  
Praise the roads on earth and water.  
Praise the eater and the eaten.  
Praise beginnings; praise the end.  
Praise the song and praise the singer.

Praise the rain; it brings more rain.  
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.

This morning as I was walking on the Highline Canal trail, I was listening to a favorite podcast about language whose past few episodes have focused on language that brings comfort, tranquility, and peace in turbulent times. One episode, for example, consisted entirely of listing out the best in show winners of the Westminster dog show (St. Margaret Mignificent of Clairedale, for example - a Sealyham terrier, 1936; or Pitter Patter of Piperscroft, a miniature poodle, 1943)

On this particular episode, the host simply read the words from John Lennon's song "Imagine, but in reverse alphabetical order. You would think that such an experiment would be too

abstract to mean much, but I found myself moved, almost to tears, at the collision of pronouns. Here's a selection to give you the general idea:

your / you / you / you / us / us / the / the / the / people / people / people / peace / living /  
life imagine / imagine / imagine / i'm / i / i / i / hope / hope / hell / heaven / all / a / a / a /  
a

I've often thought of the Trinity as a collision of prepositions. To paraphrase the hymn "St. Patrick's Breastplate," we see God with us, within us / behind us / before us / beside us / beneath us / above us, and I would add: among us / around us / between us / through us / and especially in this moment, in spite of us

As one of the poem selectors for this service, I stumbled on Joy Harjo's poem "Praise the rain" in another moment of podcast serendipity - I had three finalist poems in mind - a Trinity of poems - that dealt pretty specifically about the nature of our three-in-one God, and then I heard Harjo's version of a Doxology on the Poetry Unbound podcast.

I love the way that Harjo paints a picture of a multi-prepositional god who is lots of things at once. Harjo's God is the recipient of praise, and therefore God can be found in what follows each 'Praise' word.

Before we get to all those praises, though -

Notice God the creator, present in the catalog of living things that are scattered throughout the poem - seagull, plant, raven, trees, bear, baby, frog, fish.

Notice God the incarnate word, human Jesus present in the Eucharistic phrase 'praise the eater and eaten'

Notice God the comforter, The holy spirit present in the form of the nurturing, cooling, sustaining rain that permeates the whole poem.

To pursue a life with God is to acknowledge holiness around us. This is perhaps easier to do on a lovely mountain hike or in the sanctuary of St. Andrew's. Maybe - probably - it's more difficult to do on yet another Zoom meeting, or when we yet again fail to meet our own expectations of what it means to be a functioning human being during a pandemic.

So, to me, and maybe to you, too - each 'praise' in this poem is a reminder to make sacred our very real and human emotions.

To Praise the hurt is to endow our own rage, anger, frustration with holy purpose. Join our voices and labor and energy to mourn and grieve with those who mourn and grieve. To praise the hurt is to Say that Black Lives Matter and to mean it. It is to transform that statement into a prayer, injecting it with holy purpose.

To Praise the dark - sanctify our shadow selves so that we can forgive one another, acknowledge our lacks, ask for forgiveness, and in our current moment, to admit that we've failed to act with urgency before.

To Praise the sad - endow our tears with meaning, even if we sometimes cry without knowing why.

To Praise the crazy - let us see our craziest and most foolish ideas as holy seeds, let us turn those dreams into reality.

And finally, praise the rain - to me, this means to embrace hope, which, like the rain in the poem, will bring more rain, more hope.

Praising the rain brings to mind, too, honoring the baptismal waters, and what we promise when we are baptized - to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to respect the dignity of every human being. The 'all' and 'every' are challenging today, aren't they?

But to pursue a life with God is to be flung backwards and upside-down, to imagine a world where lions sleep with lambs, a world where there would be no need for the prayer, "black lives matter," where an infant can become king and where hope of rain can begin to seep up from the cracks of even the most desolate desert earth. It means to find the word hope (twice!) right next to the word 'hell' in our reversely alphabetized Imagine experiment. Right next to / among / beside /within / around the hurt, sad, dark, and crazy that we all feel.

So, in our ten minutes of silent meditation, I invite you to consider what it means for you to praise the rain?