

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Second Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 6

... 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.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Matthew 9:37-38

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
by your grace alone
we are accepted and called to your service;
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and empower our calling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Dilexi, quoniam

- 1 I love the LORD, because he has heard the voice of my supplication, *
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.
- 10 How shall I repay the LORD *
for all the good things he has done for me?
- 11 I will lift up the cup of salvation *
and call upon the Name of the LORD.
- 12 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD *
in the presence of all his people.
- 13 Precious in the sight of the LORD *
is the death of his servants.

14 O LORD, I am your servant; *
I am your servant and the child of your handmaid;
you have freed me from my bonds.
15 I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and call upon the Name of the LORD.
16 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD *
in the presence of all his people,
17 In the courts of the LORD'S house, *
in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
Hallelujah!

The Gospel

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Poem: from *Jubilate Agno*

by Christopher Smart

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.
For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.
For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.
For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's Creation.
For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits.
For flowers are good both for the living and the dead.
For there is a language of flowers.
For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.
For elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.

For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.
For flowers are medicinal.
For flowers are musical in ocular harmony.
For the right names of flowers are yet in heaven. God make gard'ners better nomenclators.

For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.
For B is a creature busy and bustling.
For C is a sense quick and penetrating.
For D is depth.
For E is eternity -- such is the power of the English letters taken singly.
For F is faith.
For G is God -- whom I pray to be gracious to Liveware my fellow prisoner.
For H is not a letter, but a spirit -- Benedicatur Jesus Christus, sic spirem!
For I is identity. God be gracious to Henry Hatsell.
For K is king.
For L is love. God in every language.
For M is musick and Hebrew ך is the direct figure of God's harp.
For N is new.
For O is open.
For P is power.
For Q is quick.
For R is right.
For S is soul.
For T is truth. God by gracious to Jermyn Pratt and to Harriote his Sister.
For U is unity, and his right name is Uve to work it double.
For W is word.
For X is hope -- consisting of two check G -- God be gracious to Anne Hope.*
For Y is yea. God be gracious to Eennet and his family!
For Z is zeal.

* *In Smart's manuscript, the letter 'X' was drawn as two G's back to back.*)

Reflection:

Today's gospel (about Jesus's "Little Commission" to the Apostles) and Psalm (loving/finding joy in God) provide us with the natural question of what it means when those two concepts merge. In other words, to quote Frederick Buechner, where do we find our vocation, at the intersection between "the world's deep need" and "our deep gladness"? Christopher Smart's long poem *Jubilate Agno* is one man's way of living into vocation. This one-of-a-kind glimpse into Smart's inner spiritual life is at once poignant, encyclopedic, playful, and puzzling. In fact, Smart's habit of constant (and aggressive!) public prayer was what put him into St. Luke's Hospital "for Lunatics", where he worked on his poetry. This poem is essentially a long prayer of praise. In this snippet, notice how Smart finds inspiration in flowers, the English alphabet, and in the individual lives of those for whom he prays. Again, this is just a tiny selection, and

for the curious, please do seek out his famous meditation on his cat Jeoffry, as well as Benjamin Britten's wonderful setting, "Rejoice in the Lamb," linked below.

[Britten, "Rejoice in the Lamb"](#)

[Full text of Smart's Jubilate Agno](#)

Questions for Reflection:

- In this moment, where does your "deep gladness" meet the world's "deep need"?
- Take one organizational scheme (the colors, the signs of the zodiac, the alphabet, etc.) and try your own version of Christopher Smart's prayer

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.**