

Thanksgiving Day B 2021

Joel 2:21-27

Psalm 126

Matthew 6:25-33

On the wooded hillsides of my childhood home,
Water springs up from the earth in abundance
And runs down in little streams
Into the small valleys,
Where the streams join other rivulets
Sprung from other hillsides.
Everywhere, in every hollow,
There are streams joining together
And running towards the river
That feeds another river
That journeys to the sea.

Close to my home,
Tucked into a hillside,
There is a little springhouse,
Really just a hutch,
Made of stone.
At the opening,
There is a lip of stone,
And flowing over it, or waiting just beneath it,
Is the water, welling up from the earth.

In most years,
You – or more likely your dog,
Could walk a few steps off the path,
Beside the smallest of watercourses,
Stand on the stone step,
And drink from the spring.

But a few years ago,
In a time of drought,
The spring turned to mud,
And then disappeared.
You could stand on the stone step,
And it was as if there was nothing there.
You would wonder
Why someone had come there to build a little stone house.

All through the time of drought,
There was nothing.

But at last the rains returned,
And then, one day,
You could just barely see water
Deep down beyond the stone step,
And finally, the water began to flow again,
Over the stone step, down the hillside,
Towards the stream
That leads to the river that journeys to the sea.

These are the promises of our tradition.
The river of God is full of water.
The land is good.
The source of life is unquenchable.

Despite all evidence to the contrary,
Nothing will change this.

Our task as people of faith
Is perfectly simple,
If not easy.
We are here to hold on to the truth,
That the land is good,
The source of life is unquenchable,
And the river of God is full of water.

We are here to hold on to the truth,
Because with that truth
Undergirding all that we are,
All we shall become,
All that we do,
We receive power
To seek the renewal of the world
That is already, not yet, and always springing forth.

I have been told
That a stream once ran past this church.
If we walked to the corner,
We would stand where the water once flowed.
Under the concrete,
Under the plastic fencing,
Under the rocks,
Under the tents of those who have no homes,

The water flowed.

If only we could always know so clearly
what is underneath our feet.

If only we could know at every moment,
The history and the hope
That breathe in the air around us.

On this day, when we give thanks,
Let's pause, for a moment,
Take a deep breath, and remember this –
The river still flows under the ground.
There is an unquenchable source
That we can never stop.

There is a promise beyond us,
Hidden safe with God,
ready to unfold, someday, somehow, no matter what.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,
Will come again with joy,
Shouldering their sheaves.
The promise does not fail.

If only we could remember
And lead each other into
The promise of God
That waits hidden and patient
Inside the mess and heartache and uncertainty
Of every person's life,
And every nation's life.
The damage and devastation
Covering our planet.

The river is still there.
The promise is unbroken.

It is for us to discover,
And live into,
And share with one another.

The promise is ours
Because we are the people
Who hold on to hope.
The people who can tap into the river,
The people who can see

Beyond division into reconciliation,
Even beyond death
Into new and mysterious life.

New and mysterious life
For our world,
For our communities,
For us as individuals.
God is waiting for us to discover who we will be.
There is something hidden underground
In each of us,
Something that can be uncovered,
And tended,
And made to grow.

What does that mean?
How do we tend the garden,
Tap the water?
We have communities where we learn and practice together,
We have prayer, those times when we return
To the center of our life in God,
And we have the stories of people of faith,
Through many generations.
The journey of the people of God.

Yes,
To some it seems a frightening time
To begin any journey,
To step out into an unknown future.
To practice a frail hope.
To drink from an unseen river.

Everything seems uncertain.
We hold our breaths,
Waiting to see what tomorrow will bring,
And the day after tomorrow,
And even when the future arrives,
We will face the unknown.

But the promise of Jesus is this –
The blessing is here, right now,
Hidden inside the mess and worry of our lives.

The river may be underground,
We may be afraid every time we listen for news.
But underneath all the bad news,

In the midst of all the uncertainty,
There is something real and true,
Something that lasts
When everything is changing.

The water of life
Is welling up
All around us,
To take, and to share.

This I believe, above all else,
Without question and beyond reason.

This is what gives me hope,
So that underneath all the worry
That I and you
And all of us would be crazy not to feel,
Underneath all the worry and anxiety
I find that I have no ultimate worries.

Underneath all the anxiety
That it would be senseless
Not to acknowledge,
I am not anxious about life.

Consider the lilies of the field.
They neither toil nor spin,
And in fact,
They can be consumed by fire.
But their seeds remain.

Consider the children of God
Just outside our doors.
They lack for proper clothing,
And food,
And they have no shelter
From the weather
And are beset by many dangers.
But their preciousness remains.

They are ours to consider,
To place at the center of our concern.
To care for,
To invite into welcoming and empowering partnership.

There is no Thanksgiving without them.

And at the same time,
There is no Thanksgiving
Until we relinquish our anxiety
For ourselves,
For those outside our doors,
For our common life,
For the planet itself.

Relinquish our anxiety,
And abandon ourselves to hope.

Without our hope,
That the river of God is full of water,
That the source of life is unquenchable,
We have nothing to offer.

So I would invite us,
Invite you, invite myself,
As we give thanks today,
To give thanks for the hidden river,
The buried seed,
The lilies of the field,
The elusive and mysterious gift of hope
That is ours to hold and share
In a world that is still good
And waits to be made new.