

Trinity Church in the City of Boston

The Rev. Morgan S. Allen

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Transfiguration & Annual Parish Meeting, Luke 9:28-36

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle in the hearts of your faithful, the fire of your Love. *Amen.*

Lord, have mercy, Trinity Church: *we have been in the cloud.*ⁱ

For two difficult years, an unseen force has imperiled our every breath. Through air thinned by necessary caution and persistent anxieties, we – and all the world with us – have scaled a mountainⁱⁱ of challenges, for so long its peak past the limits of our vision and beyond the reaches of our science.

During hot summers and snowy winters, we have climbed unexplored territories, every step weighed down heavyⁱⁱⁱ with the wearying burden of decision, after decision, after decision, after decision. Using strange, new tools, we charted paths through the thickets ahead. We readied careful, clever plans ... only to discover sudden treefalls and variant headwinds that required *new* plans and *new* maps and *new* decisions, decisions, decisions.

These crags have taken lives *so many lives*, and so many livelihoods have been lost along its harsh way. The new topographies have also set old horrors in stark, urgent relief. And no matter how difficult the surrounding terrain, those legacies of suffering and systemic unfairness have stood alone, commanding redress and repair – now, and not later.

In all these fogs,^{iv} we have bumped into one another. Thorny bramble has torn at us, left our shins bloody and raw. Some have left our party to seek a less demanding road, and we have not seen them since. Frustrated and fitful, at times we have struck out on *our* own, making progress more difficult for ourselves and for our companions.

Yet, through all this wilderness, we have prayed for the company of our God.^v Whether sharing a common pew or a common screen, no matter where we have found ourselves or in what condition, we have sought our God's nearness, proclaimed our God's Word, and sung our God's praise. And – blessing, upon blessing – with tender hearts, we have felt the Spirit move, have we not! Hitching and halting, yet *hopeful*: step by difficult step, with outdoor worship and picnics around the city; with holidays shared and babies baptized; in glad reunions and those simple pleasures of community – kind eyes, hearty handshakes, hugs. God has been faithful.

And just as we seemed to cross the summit and dared draw bold, slaking breaths ... during these same days when the pandemic's clouds finally began to lift from us and from all people ... we stood at what we prayed would be the virus' final peak; we looked across the world; and we saw war. Without metaphor, **WAR**: the horrible madness of trucks and tanks, planes and carriers, soldiers and artillery bearing down with death and destruction *at this very moment.*

Even from where we are continents away, the ground shakes, the rocks slide, and our footing slips. A chasm of unplumbed depth yawns below us and terrible sierras now rise around us. The fog regathers, and we cry out:^{vi}

Why, Lord?

What is happening with us and with the world you have made?

Where are you in all of this?

And, people of God, if we are not faithful in our cry, we will hear only the echo of our own voice calling back to us. If we are not faithful, we will hear only what we want to hear – words of ease, and not words of Truth. If we are not faithful, we will set ourselves to building temples for idealized, bygone days; we will declare that God has ordained this suffering according to some strategy we cannot discern; and we will license returning violence for violence.^{vii} Be sure: such courses will not be these horrors' cure, but their spark – gasoline for angry nations' fires.

As we at Trinity Church – along with the whole earth – look toward the year ahead, hear the Good News declared from the cloud,^{viii} clear and righteous and hard as stone:

God has no plan.

God has no plan!

God ... has ... **you.**

Created in generosity and made for Love,

God has you.

And me.

And all of us.

God has Trinity Church,

The Episcopal Church,

and the Body of Christ throughout the world.

See, the Creator of heaven and earth set the stars in motion and the planets on their courses *with nothing other than the power of Love*. Our God wrought into the cosmos' finest, most mysterious elements a hope for that Divine Love's fulfillment, a dream for all people to be reconciled – *to be at Peace* – with God and with one another.^{ix} And the Holy One who dared entrust us with the freedom to *choose* this Love ... longs for the cooing child to rest with asp and adder ... longs for the leopard to lie down with the kid ... longs for the lamb to share straw with wolf and lion alike^x ... and, yet, will not touch any Divine finger to make it so.

No, *we* must labor for God's dream.^{xi}

Therefore, all we do today – here and everywhere and always – **makes a difference**, aligns us either with the hopes of this God of Life or the violence of those principalities of death.

For every petty meanness we indulge and every lip-licking judgement we relish, every animus we coddle and every selfishness we stroke, grows ... *grows*, beyond ourselves alone: one malignant cell of bitterness finding kindred cruelties, growing stronger and sharper, until its savagery exceeds any individual's willful control or conscious intent, until it threatens and wounds, until it takes up arms. In the face of such evil, we can continue to bless our little blasphemies, reassure one another that our squalor will remain only in our pews, only in our inboxes, only at our tables^{xii} ...

or ...

we can repent, finally and forever; we can turn toward the risen Jesus; and we can dream as God dreams.

For – thanks be to God! – Trinitarians, take heart that we gather with the only force powerful enough to turn back armies for Good, the only force powerful enough to end every siege and halt every horror. Hear the call from the cloud^{xiii} – clear and righteous, hard as stone and soft as snow: *Ally yourselves, dear friends, with the mighty power of Christ's redeeming Love!*

And in this house, “let [our] love be genuine [and let us] hold fast to what is good.”^{xiv}

In this house, let us “love one another with mutual affection [and] outdo one another in showing honor.”^{xv}

In this house, let us “be ardent in spirit and serve the Lord,” let us “rejoice in hope [and] persevere in prayer.”^{xvi}

In this house, let us “contribute to the needs of the saints [and] extend hospitality to strangers.”^{xvii}

In this house, let us “Bless those who persecute [us]; bless and do not curse them.” Let us “Rejoice with those who rejoice, [and] weep with those who weep.” Let us “Live in harmony with one another ... [and] take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”^{xviii}

And “so far as it depends on [this house,]” let us “live peaceably with all.”^{xix}

For *believe*: day by day, every soul seeking Love will grow ... *grow* in generosity and understanding, *grow* in loyalty and hope ... one soul of mercy finding kindred kindnesses, growing more gracious and more loving.^{xx} And this Beloved Community will grow, too, in strength and substance. And loving more and loving better, we will grow with the momentum of God's hopes, beyond what we could ask or imagine.^{xxi}

Surely God has no plan; yet, just as surely, *God has you*. And me. And all of us. And with Love as our will and way, in the company of the Holy Spirit, we will be enough for whatever we encounter on the trail ahead.

For the life of the world to come,
Amen.

ⁱ Luke 9:34-35. The metaphor of a mountain hike draws on words and images from the day's Transfiguration Gospel, as noted.

ⁱⁱ Luke 9:28.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 9:32.

^{iv} Luke 9:34-35.

^v Luke 9:28.

^{vi} Luke 9:34.

^{vii} Luke 9:31-33.

^{viii} Luke 9:35.

^{ix} God has stitched into every being (and, I believe, every micron of every particle of every grain of sand) a desire for these loving connections, yet God will only call, and never compel. God's dream is for *us to choose this Love with which we were created*, not to manipulate us to make it so. Declarations that "This is God's plan" is a strategy to avoid facing both our mortal limits – as when we grapple a pandemic – and our mortal responsibilities – as when the world goes to war.

^x Images from Isaiah 11:6-9.

^{xi} And we will never labor alone. Whenever we labor for what God hopes, the Holy Spirit will enrich our every faithful effort.

^{xii} If we concede our freedom to the idea that all we experience is part of God's plan, then we find permission to indulge all the daily cruelties catalogued here. If we dare accept the responsibility that accompanies God's gift of freedom, then we recognize the terrible consequence of our "little blasphemies" and their real tether to warships.

^{xiii} Luke 9:35.

^{xiv} Romans 12:9.

^{xv} Romans 12:10.

^{xvi} Romans 12:11-12.

^{xvii} Romans 12:13.

^{xviii} Romans 12:14-17.

^{xix} Romans 12:18.

^{xx} Here is the Good News! Just as those meannesses matter, so, too our kindnesses. Love begets Love begets Love, and, in the fulfillment of time, only Love will endure in our life with God. As an Episcopal parish priest, I believe – in my every bone and every breath – that God calls congregations to nurture Beloved Communities that share in this Love, sowing God's Love pew to pew and far beyond. We underestimate the power of such Beloved Community at our own loss.

^{xxi} Ephesians 3:20.