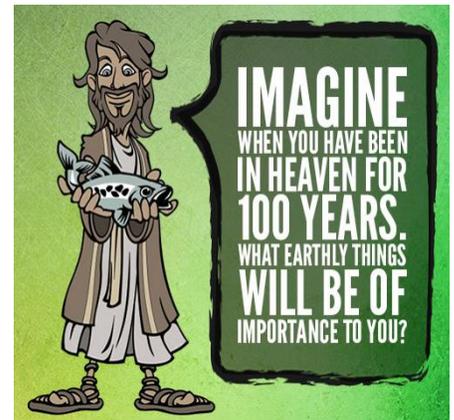


Our Collect each week “collects” the readings to find their common thread, and gives that thread back to us as a short prayer. Today’s Collect does a particularly good job of finding the connection between all our lessons. (Don’t worry: I’m not going to preach on all our lessons!)

What our Collect gives us today is the idea that when we get anxious we are probably focusing on the wrong things, focusing earthly things, things that don’t endure. Earthly things are fleeting, flimsy. At best, they distract us from what is truly important in life.

Here is a short list of “earthly things:”

- We get anxious about money, or the perceived lack thereof.
- We worry about power, status, and our “place in the pecking order.”
- We worry about what others think of us, and whether they, or life, has treated us fairly.
- Not to mention anger, bitterness, vengeance, and its cousin: despair.



This is a lot to potentially be anxious about. Even when we are not anxious about these cares of life, there’s death to fear. But these earthly things are not gospel; gospel is Good News.

And the Good News today is that our Collect contrasts the earthly things of our anxieties with what it calls “heavenly things.” These are things we do in the here and now that orient us toward the new reality of our God-life to come. These heavenly things are not just for a future when we are in God’s Kingdom. They are for now, for the journey, because heavenly things both build God’s Kingdom and endure forever.

So, what are these “heavenly things?” I started to make a list by contrasting with the earthly things. But soon I realized that my list of “heavenly things” is none other than the “fruit of the Spirit” that the apostle Paul talked about:

- Love (specifically, love of God, love of others, and love of self, in that order).
  - Joy (which is to say, an attitude of thanksgiving for what we have).
  - Peace (a willingness to let you have what you have, even if what you have is more or better than what I have).
  - Patience (the practice of waiting for God’s timetable rather than forcing things to happen according to my plan).
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- Gentleness (letting you be you, even when you are so clearly WRONG in my estimation).
- Goodness (choosing God’s economy rather than the human calculation).
- Faith (that our creator exists, is a continuing force for good, loves each of us beyond measure, and wants a relationship with us).
- Meekness (I don’t have to be first, in charge, or in control). AND
- Temperance (moderation in all things).



These are heavenly things, the things we are to hold onto, practice, and even (as our Collect says) even to love.

So let’s look at our first lesson through the lens of our Collect. In our first lesson today, the people who God had freed from slavery in Egypt began to complain against their leaders, Moses and Aaron, in the wilderness. They were out of bread and they remembered the “good old days” of slavery. They apparently had selective memory about having been fed their fill of meat and bread, but had forgotten the harsh task-masters, back-breaking toil, and lack of freedom to control their own lives.

So, the people did what people often do in these dire situations: they turned on their leaders. “Can’t you see we’re starving here?” they asked. “Did you bring us into the wilderness to kill us? We’re HUNGRY.”

The wonderful thing is, God heard them. We can complain to God. And God will respond (as God sees fit, of course). And God told Moses he would give the people bread to eat, bread from heaven, “daily bread.” Food from God that could not be stockpiled, stored, or a competitive advantage gained by using it. “A little test,” God said, to see if the people would follow his rules. “Just eat the God-food today, be thankful, and trust that there will be God-food tomorrow.”

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Let’s see if there are any hints about how the people will do with this test. Here’s the first hint, in the form of a question: Were the people still carrying the gold and silver they fleeced from the Egyptians on their way out of slavery?

We heard the answer in today’s Psalm, didn’t we? The answer is “yes.” Today’s lesson is from Exodus chapter 16. In Exodus chapter 32, the people built a golden calf from the jewelry their children were wearing. Then they worshiped the calf, thanking this idol for freeing them from slavery in Egypt.

The people were starving, they said. But they were weighed down with this totally useless gold and silver, this metal that would soon lead them astray. The people had faith that this metal would save them, rather than God. Maybe they thought that they could run to the nearest Great Harvest bakery for bread, out there in the dessert, if they ran out of food.

A funny thing happened while I was looking to see if the people still had the gold and silver they took from the



Egyptians. I discovered that they also had animals, flocks and herds of animals of their own that they took with them when they left Egypt. So, here's another question for you: Why were the people hungry if they had all those animals they could have eaten?

Here's my theory: Perhaps they didn't perceive their animals as food. People's wealth back then was related to how many animals they owned. Their income came from their animals. No one would want to eat their wealth. No one would want to eat the source of income. Perhaps they expected to need their flocks and herds in the Promised Land, to avoid being poor there.

The picture we get here, once we stop taking this incident at face value, is a people in a new reality trying to hold on to their old ways. Yes, they were hungry. But food was all around them. And what they valued most—wealth—is one of those things that will not endure. Worse, what we see here is that by holding on to something mis-perceived as valuable out there in the wilderness, they endangered their relationship with God.

But God is patient. God lets us murmur. And God responds, at times even when we are hungry but surrounded by food. God is faithful and supplies our needs, whatever they are, and what God gives us is not always what we want or think that we need. But God knows what we truly need, and he knows what will sustain us and keep us safe.

I always wonder how the scripture lesson applies to Church of the Resurrection as a community. What are we holding onto from our past, that's blinding us to our present and endangering our future? Could it be that we are actually surrounded by the very thing for which we hunger most?