

Melting Snow and Cleaning up after your dog in the backyard  
Leaves left forgotten, Lost toys, barbeque and lawn tools

Wasteland, TS Eliot  
April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.

Diana Butler Bass wrote last week....How often times in my own life are like what happens in the riparian zone: the ground under my feet softens, my steps turn tentative, and I become unsure of where or how to move ahead.

The riparian zone is the riverbank, that which is neither solid ground nor fully water. It appears mucky, often ugly and full of trash. But it is one of the most important physical spaces on earth; it cleans the river, acting as a filter for water; controls floods; and teems with life. Without healthy riparian zones, the planet will die.

**This is the geography of trust and transformation,** where the safe shore dissolves and we feel disoriented as we consider what we should do next.

Jay Group question, seeming so calm... image of a duck.

Basic theology

Belonging precedes believing and credo statements precedes faith precedes trust

Trust. 249 references in scripture

At your command, all things came to be the vast expanse of interstellar space Galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses and this fragile Earth, our island home. From the primal elements you brought forth the human race blessed US and made us the stewards of creation. But we turned against you and one another. **And we betrayed your trust.** BCP

### Gospel of Mark 5

<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was still speaking with her, messengers came from the synagogue leader's house, saying to Jairus, "Your daughter has died. Why bother the teacher any longer?" <sup>36</sup> But Jesus overheard their report and said to the synagogue leader, "**Don't be afraid; just keep trusting.**

### Wisdom 3:9

**Those who trust in the Lord will know the truth.** Those who are faithful will always be with him in love. Favor and mercy belong to the holy ones. God watches over God's chosen ones.

### Gospel of John 14

<sup>11-14</sup> "Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can't believe that, believe what you see—these works. **The person who trusts me will not only do what I'm doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing.** You can count on it. From now on, whatever you request...

As we commit ourselves to Follow the Way of love, digging deeper into our relationship with God we ask what is the object of faith? The earliest stories of the gospel speak to us as transformation through the practice of discipleship within an alternative community described to us in Acts.

From these stories from the early followers of Jesus we understand that they trusted him and he trusted them to become disciples, and became agents of radical change. These early followers are so unlike much of contemporary Christianity that speak mostly of individual salvation and detailed promises of prosperity or afterlife.

These early Christians, and we ourselves as we practice deeply the Way of Love recognize that faithfulness is not a believe system with frequent flyer miles or other benefit programs, but **rather a way of being in the world** behaving in ways that demonstrate our trust relationship with God.

We are not acting upon beliefs but believing through our actions.... not so much believers who act, but actors who trust.

Recalling our recent readings from the sermon on the plain, there is not a single word that instructs us what to believe, Jesus give us challenging words of what to do. We might say that Jesus is providing us a manifesto of behavior, not a method of transactional benefits.

The Way of Love is not an agreement to believe certain things about the Trinity in order to receive benefits promised by the institution.

As we have often explored Constantine's institutionalization of Christianity, and the declaration of the Nicene Creed as the pledge of allegiance to the church, we must note that there is not a single word about what to do, only what to believe. A stark contrast to the Sermon on the plains.

When we consider Christianity as a system of belief and creeds nothing is required but our passive participation, on the other hand **when we practice Christianity, as a way of love, a path to follow, we are born again** if you will with fresh eyes to see and fresh ears to hear.

It is not surprising then that some prefer to be saved rather than to participate. John Phillip Newell quotes Carl Jung when asked if he believed in God responding, 'I don't need to believe, I know'.

For me the exercise of religion is not to transform us into proper believers, which to be sure is important, but more importantly to practice, practice, practice the Way of Love to deepen our relationship with God, to embrace creation as the power of life to expand our Holy and Blessed consciousness, that we might see things that eyes do not normally see."

As Bonhoeffer reminds us

*Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*

*"Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life"*

*"Faith without works is not faith at all, but a simple lack of obedience to God."*

In a time such as ours he wrote concerning Hitler:

"If I sit next to a madman as he drives a car into a group of innocent bystanders, I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe, then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver." "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

Diane Butler Bass suggests the ground beneath us appears to be disappearing... we are frightened, the pain we feel with the war in Ukraine is overwhelming, civil disruption in our own country, racism, homelessness, poverty, we are at a loss for what to do. There is for us a spiritual geography a liminal place. It is the place between what was and what will be, between certainty and loss.

As the two-year winter of covid recedes we have spiritual and practical work to do...clean up the mess in our backyard, resurrect our belonging with our faith communities, families, and friends. Rekindle our trust with ourselves, with God, with those we love.

Move through the riparian zone into the clear flowing waters....  
Put on our mud boots and clean up the back yard....

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.

13:7 So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?'

13:8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.

13:9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

What does this parable from Jesus say to us? How is it inspiring, challenging? What does this mean to me in real time, trusting that the Holy Spirit continues to be speaking to me?

Imagine that the fig tree is someone you love more than yourself... a child, partner, parent, close friend? You are frustrated that their life or your relationship with them is not fruitful.. you are ready to walk away.

Imagine if someone you trust deeply stops you, pushes back against your fear and anger, and ask you to trust them to nurture and care for this person you love so deeply. Perhaps it is a teacher, a counselor, spiritual director, therapist, drug counselor, or a trusted friend that knows both of you....

You soften your resolve, you let go of the pain that you carry, your frustration, your fear, anger and you trust your friend.

Might I suggest that the gardener is Jesus, and his recommendation of loving care in the form of fertilizer and loosing of the soil is acting on the Way of Love.

I suggest that as we gather here this morning, not fully emerged from the time of Covid, consumed with yet another unnecessary war, that we have been changed existentially by the world.

God is calling us to a new way of being together, a loosening of our soil .... learning mindful meditation, celebrating joy and blessing, helping us value the practice of the way of love, paying attention, being in a deep relationship with God grounded in Trust.

Carl Jung observed that in the Christian resurrection story the risen Christ is not found where his body was laid. The story is not about resuscitation. It is about resurrection. It is not about reviving the old form. It is about something new, something we could never have imagined, emerging from death.

Let us pick up the stones and rubbish over which we stumble and build an altar  
Let us listen to the sound of breath in our bodies  
Let us listen to the sounds of our own voices, our own fears, our own fears  
Let us name the harsh light and the soft darkness that surrounds us  
Let us claw ourselves from the graves we have dug  
Let us lick the dirt from our fingers  
Let us reimagine a way of love grounded in trust, joy, and blessing.  
Let us practice resurrection.

May we together be thankful, and deepen these gifts into our uncertain futures, as Merton wrote: God, we have no idea where we are going, we trust you always, we will not fear, for you are ever with us. And I add, we are with you...

John Shelby Spong, *Eternal Life: A New Vision*  
John Philip Newell, *The Rebirthing of God*  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* and others

Rex McKee  
March 20, 2022  
Third Sunday in Lent