

## We Sing of Worship and Scripture

Lent 3

March 11, 2007

A doll of salt, after a long pilgrimage on dry land,  
came to the sea and discovered something she had never seen  
and could not possibly understand.

She stood on firm ground, a solid little doll of salt,  
and saw there was another ground that was mobile, insecure,  
noisy, strange and unknown.

She asked the sea, "But what are you?"

It replied, "I am the sea."

And the doll said, "I cannot understand, but I want to. How can I?"

The sea answered, "Touch me."

So the doll shyly put a foot forwards and touched the water,  
and she gained the impression that the sea was beginning to be knowable.

She withdrew her leg, looked down and saw that her toe had gone.

She was afraid and said, "Oh, but where is my toe?"

What have you done to me?"

And the sea said, "You have given something in order to understand."

Gradually, the water took away small bits of the doll's salt,  
and the doll went further and further into the sea.

At every moment she had a sense of understanding more and more,  
and yet of not being able to say what the sea was.

As she went deeper and deeper, she dissolved more and more, repeating,  
"But what is the sea?"

At last, a wave dissolved the rest of her and the doll said,  
"It is I."

She had discovered what the sea was, but not yet what the water was.  
The doll knew what the sea was when she became –  
minute as she was – the vastness of the sea.

(Retelling of a story by Anthony de Mello in One Hundred Wisdom Stories from  
around the world)

When we worship God, we are like that doll of salt,  
standing by the edge of the ocean.

insignificantly small in the presence of vastness, yet struggling like Jacob,  
to take in the wonder of God.

We turn our hearts and minds and bodies toward God in wonder.

One of the current teachers calls worship a "royal waste of time"  
and, to much of our fast-paced world, it would seem so.

Worship calls us to encounter God –

to listen for the voice of God in scripture and

to be touched and shaped by the grace of God in sacrament.

Like the doll of salt, putting its foot in the sea, we encounter the mystery of God in  
worship.

One person puts it this way:

*If I do not participate in a worship service at least once a week,  
I feel lost, not just on Sunday but for the whole week.  
Worship feeds me.  
It speaks to me about how I am living my life;  
what changes I am needing to make, what is life giving that needs to be celebrated.  
It helps me to remember that in the coming week  
nothing will separate me from the love of God no matter how I feel or what happens.  
God is there.  
Worship is a time for reflecting on how we live our lives.  
it is challenging and affirming.  
It helps in decision making.  
It says that if we follow the way of Jesus there will be pain in our lives,  
we will have to speak up, and we will be misinterpreted.  
Worship gives people the strength to carry on, for example,  
when a loved one dies, when one is stricken with cancer,  
or when one hears the horrendous newscasts on TV that some man went crazy and ran  
through a school shooting children.  
Worship gives people the strength to face life. (Eager for Worship, Carron)*

Worship also gathers us in community  
where we can be shaped by the stories of faith,  
stories that remind us that, no matter how different we may be from one another,  
in God's eyes we are equally precious.  
Worship invites people with very diverse lives  
to interact respectfully, so that those who often know rejection find belonging.  
Through worship, we connect with the historic church –  
in hymns and creeds and ancient prayers –  
and with the universal church, our brothers and sisters throughout the world.  
In worship, we thank God who gives God's self to us  
and we respond to the invitation to give of ourselves  
through concrete acts of love and justice, through offerings of our money and our time.  
Worship challenges us to go beyond our narrow perspectives  
into acts of self-giving.

The Song of Faith proclaims:

*We offer worship  
as an outpouring of gratitude and awe  
and a practice of opening ourselves  
to God's still, small voice of comfort,  
to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge.  
Through word, music, art and sacrament,  
in community and in solitude,  
God changes our lives, our relationships and our world.  
We sing with trust.*

If worship can be said to be a 'royal waste of time,'  
it is an hour that we can't afford **not** to waste, so vital is it.

If worship gathers us to sing,  
Scripture is *“our song for the journey, the living word  
passed on from generation to generation  
to guide and inspire,  
that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place  
from the human experiences  
and cultural assumptions of another era.”* (Song of Faith)

Scripture, the Bible, is at the heart of our Christian tradition.  
It is the story of our human encounter with God.  
Yet for many modern people, the Bible can be a stumbling block,  
turning them away from a serious commitment to faith.  
Stories of violence, stories that are factually unbelievable –  
creating the world in six days –  
codes that legitimize the oppression of women or slaves,  
writings that condemn Jews or homosexuals...  
how do we understand the centrality of the Bible for us  
when sometimes it stands at odds with the love of God in Jesus Christ?

Our new statement of faith  
reminds us that the Bible was written by people,  
people like us who were of their own time and culture,  
struggling through story to tell of their encounter with God  
and the meaning they made of those experiences.  
The Bible is a historical human document that tells us how  
our spiritual ancestors saw things – not how God sees things.  
Yet we can also say that the Bible is inspired by God  
because it was written by communities of people  
who were moved by their experience of the Spirit.  
When, today, our communities of faith read the Bible,  
we, too, need the gift of the Spirit to wrest from its ancient texts  
life-giving words for our time and our lives.

The bible is our sacred scripture, our foundation document.  
Without the bible, Christianity would fall apart.  
The bible points to God and to Jesus, the Word.  
The stories of the bible shape our sense of who we are  
and what our life with God is about.  
These stories and visions give us a sense of identity as Christians.  
And, the bible is our “wisdom tradition”.  
It helps us struggle with central questions of life:  
What is real?  
How shall we live?

Because we see the Bible as a historical document,  
we can seek to understand the ancient contexts.  
What did the words mean for the communities that produced them?  
We can ask if experiences really happened,

or if they happened the way they are described,  
but those questions are not as important as this one:  
What was the meaning of this story for the people of that time,  
and what is its meaning for us today?

There has been a flurry of interest lately about a documentary film  
which claims that the burial tomb of Jesus' family has been found.  
Although I haven't watched the documentary,  
I have reservations about its claims.  
But does the idea that Jesus' bones exist shake the foundations of my faith?  
No. That's because the meaning of the Easter stories  
does not rest on arguments about what the facts are.  
The truth of the Easter stories is not at stake because of this documentary.  
The story of the empty tomb is really true;  
the story of the Emmaus road is really true –  
whether or not they can ever be literally proved to be factual.  
The truth for believers is that Jesus lives –  
a figure of the present, not only the past,  
experienced by his first followers after his death  
and experienced by people to this day.  
The other truth of Easter is that "Jesus is Lord."  
That means that Jesus has been raised to God's right hand  
where he is one with God.  
Saying that Jesus is Lord means that nothing else can take that place –  
not wealth or status nor any other thing that we could idolize.  
The meaning of Easter does not rest in the hands of a documentary film maker;  
it rests in the experience of people of faith  
who, for generations, have known the presence of the risen Christ.

The bible becomes a kind of sacrament for the Christian community.  
It is a way God becomes present to us.  
Its words become a way the Spirit speaks to us in the present.  
Whether we read the bible alone at home  
or gathered as the community of faith to listen together,  
we open ourselves to hearing the Spirit speak to us through these ancient words.  
The words of Scripture become words of life for us, they become daily bread.  
As the hymn sings of scripture: (501)  
*"Break now the bread of life, Saviour, to me;  
as once you broke the loaves beside the sea.  
Beyond the sacred page, I seek you, Lord,  
my spirit waits for you, O Living Word."*

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