

“Jesus, A Holy Man with Crazy Ideas” by Kevin Barwick



Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost

November 12, 2023

Today I'd like to talk with you about Holiness. I know this may conjure up all kinds of memories and perspectives. But it's a concept that's been bouncing around in my brain for a while now. And then it bounced really hard when, several weeks ago, John Morris shared of his dislike and maybe embarrassment of the word "Christian." Before we get it into that I'd like to draw your attention to a poem. It's a poem speaking of her frustrations of reducing God to fit into a particular framework and ideology and challenging a soul to experience the Divine in all aspects of life. I invite you to see which phrase jumps out at you as I read this out loud.

The Worst Thing by Chelan Harkin

*The worst thing we ever did
was put God in the sky
out of reach*

*□□□□□□ pulling the divinity
from the leaf,
sifting out the holy from our bones,
insisting God isn't bursting dazzlement
through everything*

*we've made instead a hard commitment
to see as ordinary,
stripping the sacred from everywhere
to put in a cloud man elsewhere,
prying closeness from your heart.*

□□□□□□ □□

*The worst thing we ever did
was take the dance and the song
out of prayer
made it sit up straight
and cross its legs
removed it of rejoicing
wiped clean its hip sway,
its questions,
its ecstatic yowl,
its tears.*

□□□□□□ □□

*The worst thing we ever did is pretend
God isn't the easiest thing
in this Universe
available to every soul
in every breath.*

In the custom of Native American tradition, we are going to practice a mini version Way of Council (at our last retreat, Earth & Spirit had a full length of Council). The four

elements are deep listening from the heart, speaking from the heart, sharing spontaneously (don't think about what you're going to say) and being lean of speech (get to the heart of the matter). I'm going to ask you, if you're comfortable and brave enough, to find someone next to you and share the phrase from the poem that jumped out at you, and why. Take a minute or two.

Like I'm sure many of you (or maybe not), I would for a long time struggling to find the answers to life deepest questions. How does the earth stay on its axis and not spin out of control? What is matter and energy? Why does the world suffer if God loves us? Why *does* God love us? How do we better care for our natural world? Why is there so much fear that creates racism, hatred and inequalities? What is so "unattractive" to billions of people in history and today that people don't flock to Jesus or his message? Why am I "responsible" to carry out Jesus' mandate to bring in the kingdom? I mean, wasn't that his calling? How could he tick people off and "get away with it?" Or did he? And why did Jesus stay somewhat aloof, confusing, perplexing, vague and frustratingly complex, and yet was surprisingly attractive and endearing to so many? It was in part maybe that his holiness was a message of love, instead of hate and division, his openness to speak truth to injustice and pain, or his fierce determination balanced with tenderness.

The truth is, in answer to these questions, is that I DON'T KNOW! In fact, a part of me doesn't want to know. And if I DID know, I'd probably implode with overwhelming grief, burden, anger and love. His perplexing and sometimes circular sermons drive me nuts, like our reading about the 10 women and the oil. For example, why does Jesus have to go through several parables to explain something. It's as if he brings one to the edge of a forest and expects us to find the treasure deep in the woods (in this case, the "day and the hour of His Coming") with no GPS or map or clear instructions. Being holy truly is

a letting go of certainty and a hanging on of hope!

By the way, in the reading that Mary Carol read, why would the groom be so late for his own wedding?! Hmmm. Just a thought...

I wonder that if we had a clear spiritual GPS system, it would detract from the struggle that makes us grow. Richard Rohr, in his book *Threshold to Transformation (holiness)* says, "All great spirituality is somehow about letting go. There are two great paths that really transform us, and make it possible for us to let go: the path of great love and the path of great suffering."

If I were to entitle this sermon, I'd probably name it, *Jesus, A Holy Man with Crazy Ideas*. Crazy, in the sense of being different, living different, loving different and thinking different. If I were to have lived during his time, I'd probably be scratching my head with confusion and frustration, dowsed with an incredible attraction of curiosity and intrigue. I'd probably say to myself, "Jesus, you need to be careful, adjust, conform, or you're going to get in trouble." But then I'd think, "what a fantastic troublemaker he is!" He's breaking rules in order to re-create life." This is, in large measure, what I believe is "holiness." Breaking the rules that constrict us, keep us in fear, living out an arrogance than one is better than another. It's NOT "holiness" that excludes, but invites. It's not "holiness" that has pretense, but authenticity. It's not "holiness" that fears expressing a full embodiment of love and joy, and sorrow and struggle. Barbara Brown Taylor (former Catholic priest) in her book, *Leaving Church*, talks about having holiness with skin, e.g. to dance freely, cry freely, get angry but don't hurt anyone, paint your body with joy, sing loud, share your deepest desires with others and listening without judgment. You get the idea.

Seekers used to be expressive, it seems. I remember some "Jesus craziness" at my very first visit to Seekers at 2025

downtown. I walked in a few minutes late and sat down in the back row. All of a sudden in walked three men with their faces painted, dressed up, acting strangely weird clowning around and yet giving a lesson about loving others. (Maybe Dave Lloyd, Pat Conover and someone else-Doug Dodge?) I thought this was different (holy), and I loved it. I wish we had more embodied spirituality. Stepping out in holiness is like taking an un-calculated risk of determination and love when part of you just doesn't want to! So, as I think about being "Christian", a follower of the Way, I'm reminded to think about living my faith in real time, deeply, fiercely passionately and curiously.

As we stand at the edges of our forests, asked to go into the seemingly uncharted wildernesses,

I am challenged to walk "aimlessly" and simply wonder. We don't have to figure it out. We just need to trust being in the moment listening call and/or start walking down the path.

This was true for me during a vision quest many years ago. We trained and prepared for six months opening our hearts and minds for something unknown. All we knew was that a Lakota chief would teach us how to make our tobacco-filled circle, that we were supposed to sit alone for 5 days in the deep woods. We took only a sleeping bag, no food or water and waited for what Great Spirit would bring us. We were to empty, deeply listen, and stay open. We were to listen and learn from the animals, the natural elements and from within. My first two days I was completely bored and lonely. After one would come back to camp, he or she would go directly into the sweat lodge. It was a completely terrifying and profoundly wonderful experience as I let myself trust to not have an outcome but be present. Holiness... changing from the inside-out.

Most of my feeble attempts to stay present and deeply listen fall by the wayside. I wonder for all of us, are we able to take in Presence and walk in our wildernesses easily. I want

to say Wow! more in my life. I want to be filled with times of awe at the great mysteries. Again, Barbara Brown Taylor calls this reality a new "definition of holiness, rooted and grounded in shifting sand." In other words, staying open, fiercely loving yourself and the world around you. It's one that awes easily and loves in the moment, provocatively staying hungry and finds comfort in getting lost in the wilderness. It's living a life of "crazy holiness." I hope we can continue to walk with holiness in this confusing, hurting and spectacular world.

Say "Wow!"

*Each day before our surroundings
become flat with familiarity
and the shapes of our lives click into place,
dimensionless and average as Tetris cubes,

before hunger knocks from our bellies
like a cantankerous old man
and the duties of the day stack up like dishes
and the architecture of our basic needs
commissions all thought
to construct the 4-door sedan of safety,

before gravity clings to our skin
like a cumbersome parasite
and the coloured dust of dreams
sweeps itself obscure in the vacuum of reason,

each morning before we wrestle the world
and our hearts into the shape of our brains,

look around and say, "Wow!"
Feed yourself fire.
Scoop up the day entire
like a planet-sized bouquet of marvel
sent by the Universe directly into your arms
and say "Wow!"*

*Break yourself down
into the basic components of primitive awe
and let the crescendo of each moment
carbonate every capillary
and say, "Wow!"*

by Chelan Harkin

Go and be holy.