

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Why do you run? Where are you going? Who is with you?

In this passage from Hebrews 11 we are asked to consider the people of faith in scripture who have faith and experienced the power of God in their own lives and in the lives of the people around them—prophets, martyrs, leaders, and men & women with families and to the difficulty of the journey. And now, the author of Hebrew wants us to know, Jesus, the one who goes before us, gives us the power, strength, and attitude to help us to move forward with a message of compassion, justice, and mercy. It is costly, but we run with the sustaining power of God’s love for us and the awareness of all the witnesses that surround us. Even now we are being encouraged to run as though we are being welcomed and run knowing that Christ goes before us. In the metaphor of the race, we are embraced by a joy that we share with the witnesses who have gone before us and the witnesses that run with us now. Who are the witnesses whose stories we know because they have loved us?

We need to pay attention to their stories and ours to Walk the Way.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus has turned to his disciples, his followers, or later, witnesses, of the risen Christ. Jesus asks why they do not understand that his presence and teachings reveal the brokenness and betrayal of the people who say they are people of faith. The hoped-for love and understanding that we glimpse in bits and pieces is not all. Instead, we experience the divisions that Christ brings into our midst that reveal our shattered lives, families and societies.

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present.

We are not being asked as Christians to bring division—that is the power of Christ and truth that reveals. Rather we are being asked to reach out—feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, bring justice for the poor and unvoiced. We are being asked to recognize God’s presence—now—in our midst—“the kingdom has come near you” and perhaps, like the different kinds of storm clouds we are being asked to recognize that God’s presence might challenge us where we are standing.

Pastor Susan+

Love Draws Us Together

... [God] has made everything that is, so truly [God] does and brings about all that is done . . . we are securely protected through love, in joy and sorrow, by the goodness of God. . . . All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. —Julian of Norwich [1]

For Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), a French Jesuit priest who trained as a paleontologist and geologist, love is “the very physical structure of the Universe.” [2] That is a very daring statement, especially for a scientist to make. Yet for Teilhard, gravity, atomic bonding, orbits, cycles, photosynthesis, ecosystems, force fields, electromagnetic fields, sexuality, human friendship, animal instinct, and evolution all reveal an energy that is attracting all things and beings to one another, in *a movement toward ever greater complexity and diversity—and yet ironically also toward unification at ever deeper levels*. This energy is quite simply *love* under many different forms. (You can use another word if it works better for you.)

Love, the attraction of all things toward all things, is a universal language and underlying energy that keeps showing itself despite our best efforts to resist it. It is so simple that it is hard to teach, yet we all know love when we see it. After all, there is not a Native, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, or Christian way of loving. There is not a Methodist, Lutheran, or Orthodox way of running a soup kitchen. There is not a gay or straight way of being faithful, nor a Black or Caucasian way of hoping. We all know positive flow when we see it, and we all recognize resistance and coldness when we feel it. All the rest are mere labels.

When we are truly “in love,” we move out of our small, individual selves to unite with another, whether in companionship, friendship, marriage, or any other trustful relationship. Have you ever deliberately befriended a person standing alone at a party? Perhaps someone who was in no way attractive to you or with whom you shared no common interests? That would be a small but real example of divine love flowing. Don’t dismiss it as insignificant. That is how the flow starts, even if the encounter doesn’t change anyone’s life on the spot. To move beyond our small-minded uniformity, we have to extend ourselves outward, which our egos always find a threat, because it means giving up our separation, superiority, and control.

Christena Cleveland recognizes that so much is lost when we refuse to cross the “borders” that keep us apart.

How much are the people for whom Christ died suffering because we remain paralyzed and divided by our differences when we should be working together as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world? There must be a better and more efficient way to carry out our roles within the mission of God. Surely, we can do better. [3]

[1] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapters 1 and 27 (Long text), trans. Elizabeth Spearing (Penguin Classics: 1998), 41, 79.

[2] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Sketch of a Personal Universe,” *Human Energy*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1962), 72.

[3] Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (InterVarsity Press: 2013), 20.

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