

Pentecost 8 July 14, 2024 proper 10

How absolutely uncanny and unbelievable that for the second year in a row on July 10 we have another major flood in Barre! Thank God not quite as bad as last year, but bad and especially traumatizing happening on the anniversary date. With a little bit of gallows humor, I heard one of our neighbors ask, "Wait, I don't remember voting to make this an annual event!" But once again on the bright sunny morning of July 11th people were out with shovels and buckets; like I said last year people in Barre know how to use a shovel, and believe me, nobody forgot a thing in the last year! A lot of reflection going on as well as the clean up, too. The other day I spoke with a guy who is a Christian, but rather fundamentalist in his beliefs. Reflecting on this flood occurring on the anniversary of last year's flood, he asked me if I thought this was some sort of divine judgment. I answered "Yes," which I think surprised him somewhat, and then I went on to elaborate God gave us a beautiful planet, but that we are baking it, the world is on fire, and science clearly demonstrates that a hotter atmosphere holds more moisture and it ends up getting dumped on Central Vermont and other places in catastrophic ways. And that's a judgment of our own making and we are reaping the worst of it. Mentioning this to my father in law, who happens to be a retired professor of philosophical theology who is familiar to many of you in this congregation, he recalled the theologian Paul Tillich's understanding of the "wrath of God" in his great opus, **Systematic Theology**, the "wrath of God" is not a divine feeling, but that it "is the awareness of the self-destructive nature of evil." (Tillich, **Systematic Theology**, volume 1, page 284) But still, I could not resist the temptation to play some Biblical numerical games: I began looking up the 10th verse of the 7th chapter of various Biblical books, like the Gospels and the prophets. It was mostly quite futile, of course, but interestingly Ezekiel does say, "See the day! See it comes! Your doom has gone out. The rod has blossomed, pride has budded." Mentioning this to Shawna Trader of the Rainbow Bridge Community Center and the Chair of the Barre Up! Board, Shawna said that an artist named AstraBridge had created a poster figuring out the relationship of 7/10 and the flooding we've seen on that date for two years now. Here is the poster:



There you go: the mirror image of 710 is OIL, burning fossil fuels, baking the planet, and we have flood after flood. A pretty clear sign, if we needed one, of our awareness of the self-destructive nature of evil.

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, in your word today we seek your love and peace for our lives. Open our souls that your love may inspire and transform us and our world. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

The thing that stood out to me in our Scripture lessons this morning is all the dancing. There is the terrible tale of King Herod's daughter Herodias dancing for her father, who is so pleased he offers her whatever she would like, and she consults with her mother who asked for the head of her sworn enemy, John the Baptist, who had told the truth about her unlawful relationship with the King, her former brother in law. A truly grisly and ugly little story, but one which shows the depth of the corrupt political power of the leaders in Israel in Jesus' day. The other story about dancing, though, is much more enlightening and positive. This is the account of Israel's celebration of the placing the ark of the covenant to a special sacred place Zion David made for it. David, the newly anointed king for Israel, now after victories over the enemies of Israel, after the defeat of the Philistines, now founds a new capitol in Jerusalem and brings this most sacred object of Israel's worship to this holy mountain. And there is great rejoicing, dancing, dancing and more dancing, an ecstatic frenzy of religious joy, of fervent devotion. I've always liked this story: now I'm not much of a dancer, but I've always loved the saying, "Dance like nobody is watching." Well, that exactly what David is doing, even though he has an audience of tens of thousands: so carried away with his enthusiastic love of God, that he dances with abandon.

We do not think much about dancing in the Episcopal Church: the Shakers used to dance, and among Pentecostals and some African American Holiness Churches, there is a tradition of being carried away in the spirit, just like David, of the "Holy Dance." But rather than looking at the dancing of believers, like David or some of our Pentecostal friends, there is another kind of "Holy Dance" that several modern theologians have considered as well: this is the "Divine Dance" derived from an ancient tradition in Christian understanding of "perichoresis," the movement of the Holy Trinity, how in the three-ness of God, the one who is, the one as a begotten word of Love and the one who is the Spirit of Love going forth, this three fold nature of the one God "dances in and out, dances through all creation, dances in a constant movement of love." This is our God, the Lord of the Dance, the God who dances throughout all eternity, in a

relation of love and freedom. And this God, this God invites us into this divine dance of Love: to see the relationships, to live into the relationships that bind all creation together. When we ignore this invitation to the divine dance, when we ignore these relationships, we then can do tremendous damage, damage like we saw this week in the return of destructive flooding to our beloved Central Vermont.

So what can we do? I believe God is calling us to urgent action, but action based on understanding and awareness. In the beginning of our worship today, we prayed together, we prayed that God will receive our prayers and grant that we may know and understand the things we ought to do: to care for God's creation, to care for this great gift God has given us, to see that divine dance in all creation, binding all together, that we may be part of this holy relationship, sharing that joy David had 3000 years ago, sharing this in our own lives and with all our friends near and far. We also call on God through the presence of Christ in our lives, to help us live into that amazing grace, the power of God's love to overcome the violence we do to creation, that violence that we have seen is all too prevalent in our nation, in the violence done to the African American community and other minority communities in our nation, the violence of mass shootings that that have terrorized our nation and that now the is the leading cause of children's deaths in the United State, and political violence as we saw yesterday evening that has once again marred our national life, but thankfully spared the life of former President Trump. We so truly need the power of this amazing grace today now more than ever. And now, now in response, we begin our sacred dance: we come forward to this Altar to be in communion with Christ, to share in Christ's presence among us, we come to be strengthened and nourished, to become more faithful and to heed God's urgent call to action today and in the days and weeks to come. Even in the darkness we face, floods and violence, we seek God's amazing grace to bring God's promise of love for this world to a deeper and righteous place in our lives and in the life of the world. Thanks be to God for this divine dance of grace and thanks be to Christ sharing this great redeeming love with us and helping us to share it with others. Amen.