

4th Sunday of Easter

“I can’t get no satisfaction”. I wish my younger brother Peter were here to sing the Stones song for you. For decades now he has played Mick Jagger in a Tribute band. He actually does look like Mick. That song has been playing in my head since beginning to read Sister Elizabeth Johnson’s new book *Creation and the Cross*. In the book she examines the “Satisfaction Theory” of St Anselm and questions whether this medieval interpretation of the meaning of the Cross and Redemption really does justice to our God who is love and mercy. If you don’t know what the Satisfaction theory is, know that it is embedded in your spiritual psyche, like it or not. (I don’t like it). Every time you say the Act of Contrition you are articulating this satisfaction theory. “Oh my God I am heartily sorry for having offended you. And I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all because they offend you my God who are all Good and deserving of all my love.” Underpinning this prayer is the image of a God who is easily “offended” and demands satisfaction from us, penance and pay back. But St Anselm says since God is God, so far above and beyond any human, God can only be satisfied with the sacrifice of one “equal” to his majesty. That’s where Jesus/ God/Man comes in. Johnson articulates the beauty of this theory for a feudal society of the 11th century but also points out its flaws. Is God really so “offended” by human sinfulness that God demands “payback” by the sacrifice of his Son on the Cross? Doesn’t that make God sadistic and glorify violence? I can’t go into Johnson’s full argument at this time but am hoping that we as a parish can read the book in the fall.

As an alternative to the Satisfaction theory, Johnson speaks of the “A theory of Accompaniment”. God is the one who accompanies humankind on our life journey. God is the one so in love with the whole of creation that God desires to give Godself in a way that redeems all of creation. She focuses on the image of God in Second Isaiah, where God is restoring, redeeming God’s people, bringing them out of exile, creating “anew”. But it’s the whole of creation that is being renewed. God is not some old FOSSIL but a God who fuels creation with

the energy of love. God's love is a Renewable Energy. It never exhausts itself and does not erode the ozone layer. She focuses as well on the ministry of Jesus and the Resurrection, not ignoring the Cross but letting it take its place as part of the narrative of Redemption. And what a beautiful image of Accompaniment we have today in the image of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd freely gives of himself. "I know mine and mine know me". Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who accompanies us as our Way, our truth and our life.

Accompaniment makes so much sense. If God is love as we hear in John's letter and if we all are Children of God, doesn't it make sense that God would want to accompany us as a loving parent does her children? What loving parent wants to punish and chastise their child? Correct? Of course.

We see this accompaniment lived out so powerfully in our parish in those who are involved in immigration ministry, visiting those who are detained or who are in fear of ICE raids. We see this accompaniment in the Thrive ministry, accompanying prisoners and those release from prison. We see it in the Welcome Table and the LStep. We human beings are at our best when we accompany one another. And we respond to God's accompanying us when we accompany one another. The other reason I mention Creation and the Cross is that today is Earth Day and the centerpiece of Dr Johnson's book is that God desires to renew and redeem the whole of creation. It's not just about us "human beings" It is all of creation that is the object of God's love and renewable energy. Perhaps the prayer that we should pray is this:

Oh mother earth, we are heartily sorry for having offended you. And we detest all our sins against creation because we dread the loss of this heavenly earth and the pains of a planet that we have misused. But most of all because we have offended you, mother earth who are all good and deserving of all our love. We firmly resolve with the help of God's grace to confess our sins against you, to do penance and care for our earth, to change and amend our ways in this world. And to always recognize creation as God's gift.