

The Christmas Story Is Always Happening



The Christmas story as found in Luke and Matthew's gospel never happened, yet it is still happening. This is the mystery and power of myth. Neither Mark or John bother with a birth narrative. Mind you, John sets Jesus' life within the context of a

creation story. "In the beginning was the Word..." It shouldn't really be a faith-buster to realize that Luke and Matthew's birth stories differ on a great many details. Nor should we be anxiously trying to harmonize them—although this makes for great entertainment in most Christmas pageants.

What's still happening? Right from the start we are reminded that nothing is possible without the words that have been immortalized in Mary's response to the angel's announcement. "Let it be to me according to your word". This holy "yes" is the way that new futures still come into being. We don't discover the deep purpose of our lives until we allow our soul to break through the fear that is our egoic personality structure, with those same words. And then, we become with Mary, responsible for the future that needs us in order to emerge. It all begins with consent to the good news that the best is yet to come, and it's coming through us and all willing souls.

What's still happening? Well, women like Mary are still doing an end-run around patriarchy, giving birth to a new humanity. In the words of Canadian singer-songwriter, "Mary has a child without the help of a man". I think here of Malala Yousafzai, the youngest woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for standing up to the Taliban around the rights of education for Pakistani

girls. She was shot in the head by these evil men, but survived, and hers was the first voice I heard speaking out against the Taliban's slaughter of 142 innocent school children this past week. The man who did help Mary, Joseph, also defied patriarchal and sexist norms in conspiring to give birth to the Christ child.

ISIS, along with the Syrian regime, would make it to the top of my list for those contemporary men who embody Herod energy in the story, the archetype of twisted masculine energy, willing to execute children at the altar of Empire, (or in this case, religious ideology). That energy lives today, and only the most naive and innocent of spiritual expressions deny the existence of evil. Of course, Herod also lives within each one of us, threatened by the emergence of new life (Christ archetype). There is part of us that would rather destroy the nascent life within than die to the personality structure and give birth to the new.

What else is still happening that this Christmas myth captures? Well, I love the part about the Magi, the Zoroastrian star-gazers who spend their lives in contemplation. This occupation, this preoccupation, is so subversive today, in a global society that cannot see much further than economic policy. We have no time to gaze at stars while there is money to be made and endless amounts of work to be done.



Our myopia is thrown into stark relief by the Magi, who intuit that the movement of the stars hold the secret to our future. They are not cynics. They are not materialists. They feel that the cosmos itself is impregnated with meaning and purpose, that it's going somewhere, that it's *for us* somehow. How much richer this is than the Herodian orthodoxy of materialism bent on reducing the world to physical processes, and in the

process voiding the universe of deep, intrinsic purpose.

While we're on the Magi, there's is a spiritual orientation worth replicating. First, note that they come to pay homage to the Christ child, laden with gifts. Unlike, fundamentalist Christians, who make the journey to foreign lands intent only on converting the natives to their version of religion, the Magi come purely in a spirit of devotion. They recognize that something of cosmic import is about to happen in this birth. They leave their gifts, and critically outfox Herod. They are wise men, after all, who know the ways of the world, know how the dominant order works, and have lost all interest in whatever that order has to offer them by way of bribes and favours. The story says that they "returned home *another way*". Metaphorically speaking, despite having their own belief systems and spiritual practice, (which didn't change – there was no "conversion") they were open enough to be changed through their devotion.



And while we're on the topic of the Bethlehem birth, I also love that it is cosmological in scope. The star points the way, and the star stands still over

the stable. To my mind this describes what cosmologist, Brian Swimme, calls the power of centration. The Whole con-centrates itself in this birth. A single star, representing the trillions of galaxies, is present reminding us what the writers of the myth could not have known, that we were given life by those stars, and that what is happening in the stable is the concentration of all the heavy elements that were born in a star's death. The cosmos participates in this legend of the birth of a Messiah. This is, we now know, not merely romantic. The evolutionary worldview reminds us that it takes a whole cosmos to produce a Jesus of Nazareth, and by immortalizing this story in sacred myth, we can contemplate this mystery annually.

What's still happening which the Christmas story captures? The Christ is still being born through willing souls, willing to subvert the dominant order, the insanity of inhumane living—what life looks like alienated from natural intelligence and allegiance to the deepest evolutionary currents of a Spirit-soaked universe.

Two Baptisms, A Global Transformation

John doesn't mince words.



"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

3:8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

It's not one's ancestry, it's not about one's beliefs, it's not about one's grand philosophical system. None of these things will save us "from the wrath that is to come". I'm not sure what the wrath is that John is referring to, but it has something to do with the inevitability of more violence and more misery unless we change our ways—that is, repent.

John's baptism apparently is a *response* to a changed heart, a sign that you have already had a change of heart. It's not a *means* of grace. It's not an spiritual insurance plan. Those who have come to be baptized ask the next logical question. "What must we *do*?" Again, not what must we believe. Not, what must we think. Rather what's the action that is being asked of me.

It's simple and yet for some reason eludes us in the 21st century. Share so that nobody goes without. Stop being greedy. Quit making money unethically. Treat people like human beings who are made in the image of G_d. I was watching a documentary called Human. An Australian aboriginal noted that in his ancestral language there is no word for "please" and "thank you". It's just assumed that those without have a right to receive from the community if they are in need. Why would you need a name for this exchange? It's inconceivable that a few would have more than their share when there were others that had nothing.

To the tax collectors, who made their profit by charging above the Roman quota they were given, John directs them to be fair. No gouging.

To the Roman soldiers, who used threats of violence and the capacity to falsely accuse in order to blackmail, John says, stop it.

These actions reflect the darkness that sets in when we live with the illusion that we are separate from, and therefore in competition with, other humans. The darkness set in right

about the time Empires got the idea that they should monopolize local cultures, decimating village life and a more indigenous sensibility portrayed by the story of the aboriginal above. This is probably why Jesus fought so hard to restore community after Rome entered and tried to turn Palestine into a mini-Rome, a mono-phony of civic life. Fast forward a couple thousand years, add industrialization and neo-liberal capitalism to the mix, the globalization of the golden arches and you have the decimation of community with the rise of individualism, (along with McD.'s 1/4 pounder in Paris).

John comes along with his ancestral memory of a time when humans naturally took care of each other. I don't want to romanticize this – even in indigenous communities there was inter-tribal warfare, but at least within a tribe it was unthinkable that an individual would go without. He sees the breakdown of human society and calls them to ethical repentance.

I guess this was quite radical, because his call to behave properly causes some to think that he must be the Messiah. But he says no, one is coming who will baptize, not just with water, but with "fire"! There is a baptism of water, for the forgiveness of sins. And there is this other baptism, that is aimed at burning away all the cultural, historical, personal trauma that causes one to believe that we are so separate from each other that we can just stop taking care of each other.

This illusion of separation requires strong medicine to overcome. Especially in contemporary Western society. We value privacy and independence above all else, even though it's making us miserable and lonely. We don't always recognize our misery or loneliness though. It just feels like a soul-sickness. We know that something is wrong. But it seems to be the only game in town.

To receive the baptism of the Nazarene is to have all of this

separation, born of trauma, burned away. It doesn't mean that we can't enjoy solitude. Our souls long for solitude. But when solitude is not contained by a community that shares, that looks out for one another, that does life together, does ceremony, honours the ancestors, mentors the young, gives back to Earth, it becomes soul-crushing loneliness.

John's baptism is a behavioral correction. It's critical when we're lost to hear a clear voice saying Stop It. This is no way to live. It's an outside-in shift. The baptism of Jesus is an perceptual and perspectival correction. It's a corrective to how we see reality. It's an inside-out shift. Both baptisms are necessary and complimentary. The baptism by fire is more permanent because everything that is not love is burned away, and all you are left with is compassion for self and other.

The church needs both baptisms. What the church does so well is respond to John's call to do the right thing. The executive secretary of B.C. conference of the United Church of Canada wrote that over 1/2 of the UCC churches in British Columbia is sponsoring a Syrian refugee family. It made be proud to still be associated with the church. The baptism of Jesus is also necessary, because we can't just go back home to our private silos and live by the ethics of this capitalist system, and then come to church and respond to the next crisis. At some point, we have to get purged by the refiner's fire, and challenge the system itself. Because our souls know from the inside-out that we are one with G_d, with Earth, and with each other.

Luke 3:7-18

3:7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by

him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

3:8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

3:9 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

3:10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"

3:11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

3:12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

3:13 He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."

3:14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

3:15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,

3:16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

3:17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

3:18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Redemption Interview with Dr. Mia Kalef

I thought I'd share with you a conversation my partner, Dr. Mia Kalef, and I enjoyed this week. We recorded this in our living room and thought it might be worth sharing. The night before we were visiting friends, who were expecting a baby immanently. The little guy arrived the next day! The conversation circled around redemption and it's relationship to birth, of humans yes, but of the New Human more generally. We thought of Paul's image of the whole of creation in birth pangs, but that very pressure was the necessary prelude to a new order. This is the essence of all apocalyptic scenarios.



And, of course, Advent always begin with the “mini-apocalypse. The Christ event which is recorded in the New Testament is set down as an apocalyptic occurrence. In Jesus, the whole of creation, 13.8 billion years, is gathered up – the whole of creation “centrates” in him. By his presence, Light and Love incarnate, the darkness is revealed. And, as the author of John's gospel puts it, the darkness in the world could not receive him. The darkness does not want to be called out. Because those who dwell in darkness (in unconscious or conscious collusion with that which is anti-life—evil is live

reversed—have only two choices. Repent of the darkness and turn to the light in devotion to the Source of All, or foster more darkness. This is the crisis of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, according to the gospels.

Herod is the personification of the forces within us that are attracted to darkness and refuse to repent. The only option for those whose darkness is being exposed by light (and who refuse to repent) is to rage, attack, and undermine the light, which is the absolute sovereignty of Love. But the wise ones (Magi), are those who know the movement of the stars, follow the light of cosmological wisdom that points directly to the source of redemption.

The birth pangs of Mary are the birth pangs of the totality of creation, contracting in her, to give birth to the New Human. This is the story of redemption. But the story doesn't guarantee our redemption, by virtue of telling it over and over again every Advent/Christmas. It must become the pattern of our own lives. We must, with Mary, feel these contractions within us – the contractions that contain all the evil, all the violence, all the greed, all the fear of our species and all the fear that is running our own lives. Out of this willingness to see clearly, to come to consciousness of what is and what is coming, a New Human is born, the Christ child. This is the one we must birth from within if we are to be participants in the drama of redemption.

Here is [the audio of the](#) conversation.

[The Righteous Branch](#)



Jeremiah prophesies about the emergence of “the righteous branch”. Most liberal Christians get a little twitchy about the word “righteous” because it can be interpreted as holier-than-thou. And yes, a certain expression of righteousness is off-putting. Jesus warns against

the righteousness of the Pharisees, for example—an outward expression of piety, public exhibitions of holiness, which come from the ego, and not the Kingdom of G_d.

But the righteous “branch” by definition is connected to the vine, or the Source. It is the part of the plant that will ultimately bear fruit, precisely because of this connection. And as the author of John’s gospel puts it, any branch that is not connected to the vine will be ultimately discarded – thrown in the fire. Not because of divine wrath, but because it is dead. This is the only “wrath” we experience coming from G_d, the hell of being disconnected from the Source of Life.

In truth, the world as we know it currently is living in this hell. The Paris and Beirut massacres are a manifestation of the violence of the false righteousness that Jesus warned against. ISIS is not the Righteous Branch that Jeremiah is talking about. But it’s inevitable that all religion and religious language will be clumped together in the wake of this religious violence. Even the metaphor of a “righteous branch” will be held in deep suspicion. And no doubt, ISIS believes itself to be that holy branch.

But those who perpetuate this kind of violence are already living in hell and spreading hellish hatred. They are poisoned by ideology that comes from a disconnected mind – disassociated from the reality that is Love. And we would be mistaken to assume that this hell is isolated in religious fanatics.

Truthfully, the whole human race is either connected to Love, the realm that Jesus called the Kingdom of G_d, or not. Or to clarify, we are always connected, but trauma, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, causes us to feel disconnected. And when we feel disconnected, our misery creates misery. We who are miserable, create the world in our image, a world of misery.

The world as we know it, our lives as we know them, must be purged of this trauma. There is so much poison that is infecting us at a cellular level that needs to come out. This is the death inside of us that must be excised. When it is, we drop quite naturally back into the world of G_d. We see that all is beautiful. And we see that there is nothing more beautiful than those souls who are doing the work of allowing the poison to be removed. It is not a pretty sight when viewed through the lens of ego. But this work of –let’s call it what it is–repentance, is seen as a beautiful offering when viewed from the world of G_d.

“Repent”, cried Jesus, “for the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of G_d has drawn near. Repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1:14, 15). Jesus picked up the mission of John the Baptist, who himself proclaimed and enacted a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). Liberal Christians have mistakenly downplayed or eliminated the need for repentance and the need for forgiveness of sin. Repentance is the key to entering the Kingdom of God.

What is meant by this is not that the Kingdom is some far off historical event that we are preparing for, but rather that is “very near”, very, very, near. It is like a veil, on the other side of which is the ever-present realm of Love. Truly, we can step through at any time. But only if we’ve done our work of purging, of first seeing the poison that is infecting us, and allowing it to be removed. Then the veil is removed and we say to ourselves, astonished, “O G_d, you were always here.”

The righteous branch consists of those people who have chosen to feel the pain of their trauma, to feel from within their own impurity. This is not an essential impurity, because we are manifestations of the consciousness of Love. But this Love has been stained. And the stain is truly sickening. Anybody who has not felt this and allowed for this "removal of sin" is not to be trusted. When we feel above this, we project our own impurity onto the world out there, and feel, not compassion but judgment. We deal with our disowned impurity (which is anything less than love) by obliterating the impurity we project on to others. We cast ourselves in the role of removing the impure from the face of the world – all in the name of righteousness. This is the fundamentalist mistake, and it looks like ISIS. It looks like all forms of religious fundamentalism.

But there truly is a Righteous Branch. It is formed by those who have looked within and seen how the power of darkness has ruled their life. It is formed of those souls who know that the path back to knowing this ever-present Love is the primary discipline of their life, and they are willing to face the profound grief of repentance. It is formed by those who have felt the depths of self-compassion for how much of their life has been lived disconnected from the vine, and the misery this has caused self and others. It is formed by those, who therefore, hold the broken, poisoned world, with the same compassion, and feel only love, only love for the world. It is formed by those who ask, as the work of their lives, to participate in the redemption of the trauma – not its perpetuation.

It is formed by those who inhabit and who are lived by this Love that Jesus called the Kingdom of G_d, and who know therefore that this Love will prevail. "The days are *surely* coming when I will fulfill the promise" (Jeremiah 33:14). This Love actually does prevail. But it is awaiting fruition in the beautiful, broken world. The poison, the

violence, the Empires that were built upon disconnection, will crumble and fall before this Love, because only this Love is actual. Those who know this and live it are the Righteous Branch.

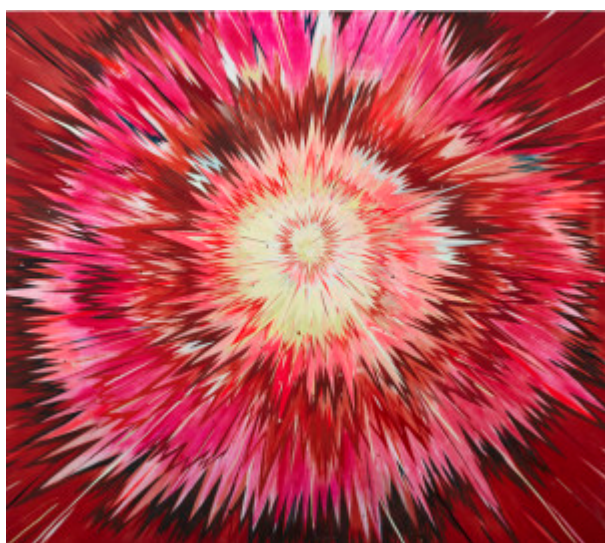
Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

The Reign of Christ



Fr. Richard Rohr does some clearing thinking about Jesus and the Christ. This Sunday is the Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday, setting us up for Advent. And the season of Advent, contrary to what most Christians believe they are celebrating, is not about waiting for the baby Jesus to be born on Christmas morning. It's

an anticipation of the coming of Christ.

Christ is our shortcut word for "The Body of God" or "God materialized." This Christ is much bigger and older than either Jesus of Nazareth or the Christian religion, because the Christ is whenever the material and the divine co-exist—which is always and everywhere.

The birth of this Christ occurred at the Big Bang, or however our universe began. This is when the "primal anointing" of matter with Spirit—incarnation—emerged. The birth of Jesus of Nazareth, for Christians, epitomizes this convergence of spirit and matter in the human realm. But the cosmic Christ, the indwelling power and presence that draws all things into communion pervades the entire universe.

Advent is about the second coming of Christ, and the second coming of Christ is not about the end of the world. It's about the end of the illusion of separation, when all will be awakened to the whole universe as a communion event.

Daniel uses the image he saw in a vision of the "coming of one like a human being" (Son of Man) who would reign over all creation. This is the "son of man" of Ezekiel, and it is the image that Jesus himself employed to describe his own mission. In him, the union of matter and spirit is revealed in the form of a human. He is the one who lives aligned with the truth of no separation. He knows himself to be the presence of the whole universe, in human form, gathered up and poured out as an offering of love, and this offering of love is none other than the primal attraction/communion/complexification dynamic suffusing all of creation.

What we wait for in the season of Advent, what we anticipate,



is the coming of the Son of Man, or stated differently, the emergence of the New Human, prefigured in Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, enfleshed. We keenly anticipate in our prayers and deepest longings that we will arrive as the New Human, capable

of containing this profound mystery revealed in Jesus. Not just with our minds, but in the way we live in community and upon our still beautiful planet.

In a sense, every time we taste into the glorious unity and unifying power of Love, we participate in the birthing (the conscious realization) of the Cosmic Christ. And when we come to the place of awareness that we want nothing else for ourselves, and when we are willing to let go of everything that is not this Love and that keeps us from incarnating this Love in the way we live, we join the great pilgrimage to Bethlehem, witnessing again and again the miracle that began with a Bang, took flesh again in Jesus, and is seeking completion in and through you. When we make of our lives a sincere offering to participate consciously in this completion project, the Christ truly reigns in our lives, or to use traditional language, Christ is King/Queen.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

7:9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

7:10 A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

7:13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

7:14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

John 18:33-37

18:33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

18:34 Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

18:35 Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

18:37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

The Widows Way



Two widows are featured in this week's readings, the widow from Zarephath who was called upon to feed Elijah, out of her poverty, and the widow whom Jesus spotted in the Temple, giving all she had to the Temple treasury, despite her poverty. As widows they were among the most economically vulnerable in 1st

century Mediterranean culture. This is why in both the First and Second Testaments, G_d commands the people to take care of the widows.

But the widow in the Temple was clearly not being taken care of, she was being taken advantage of. The priests were "devouring widow's houses" with the Temple taxes. The widow's faith despite this exploitation is commendable. It is so because she is giving out of her poverty, while the wealthy are merely giving a small portion of their accumulated wealth. She displays an attitude of fearlessness. She gives away the last of her wealth, choosing to be dependent upon G_d in a way that the Temple priests have long since forgotten how to do.

You wonder why G_d would choose an impoverished widow to feed Elijah. There must have been wealthier people in Zaraphath who could have taken him in. The implication is that in order for the vessel to be filled with grace, it's got to be empty in the first place. The emptier the vessel the more it can be filled up. The impoverished widow is chosen for the job because it makes it perfectly clear that the replenishing of the flour and oil is pure grace.

And that's the thing about affluence. The more we have the more difficult it is to see our lives as vessels through which the Abundant Grace of Source flows through. Wealth creates the illusion that our good fortune is the result of our cleverness, ingenuity, or hard work. This forms the foundation

of meritocracy. We get what we deserve, and what we get we have personally generated. (And by extension, the poor are getting what they deserve). The more we accumulate the less and less we feel our deep connection to Earth. We simply forget that everything we have as humans on this planet comes from Earth. We stop being grateful. At this point, we're officially on the take.

The spiritual danger of financial wealth is that it can perpetuate the illusion of self-sufficiency. We forget that literally everything we have has come to us as pure gift. Our bodies are the gift of billions of years of evolutionary grace. Our minds are beautiful slivers of a pervasive cosmic consciousness, concentrated amalgams of all the intelligence that preceded us, from mineral, to plant, to human consciousness.

This is why Jesus insisted that if you intended to follow him, you had to give away all your wealth. The moment you give it away, the illusion of self-sufficiency goes with it. This gift of remembering our radical dependency on earth, other human beings, and on the animating intelligence that is making it all possible is the "pearl of great price". It is a regaining of the wisdom of vulnerability. It's the return to dependence upon the village, the soil, and each other's care. Individualism is shattered, but not the sovereignty of the individual-in-community or the community-in-individuals.

The spirituality of the 21st century citizen of the developed world needs to become an empty vessel spirituality, an emptying of self again and again, so that we can witness the grace of being filled, which issues in gratitude, which means we take nothing for granted. Which means we stop being on the take and we begin to consciously see our life as an offering. This is spiritual poverty, the grace of being able to experience with the widow of Zapheneth her jars of meal and oil being replenished daily. "Give us this day, our *daily* bread".

I don't believe that this requires physical poverty, but rather what Duane Elgin calls "[voluntary simplicity](#)".

1 Kings 17:8-16

17:8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

17:9 "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you."

17:10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink."

17:11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

17:12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

17:13 Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son.

17:14 For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth."

17:15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.

17:16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Mark 12:38-44

12:38 As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,

12:39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!

12:40 They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

12:41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

12:42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

12:43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

12:44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Dead Four Days



There are a thousand ways to be dead. The shutting down of the physical body is just one. Lazarus' body shut down and Jesus cried for his friend. And then he brought him back from the dead. Not many have that kind magic in their repertoire. I'm not very interested these days in whether the story is true or not. I suspect that the writer of John's gospel wasn't overly concerned either. He wrote the story as one more sign that Jesus had mastered the physical realm, and that included death.

But the primary point is not so much that Jesus is master over death, but rather over life (which includes death). What Jesus couldn't abide was the soul dying before the body was done— spiritual death. He saw it everywhere: in the idolatry of the religious officials, who were going through the motions, but not connecting with the living G_d; in those who clung to their possessions as though their life depended on it; in the way of Roman domination and the decimation of village life; in those who allowed the Law to be a stand-in for love; in those who stood in judgment of "sinners" but who refused to look deep enough into their own broken hearts.

In him was life, and this life was the light of all (John 1).

Most of us, if we're honest, know what it's like to be dead for four days or forty years, to carry around the stench of death. Because the truth is, for me at least, is that by the time we reach adulthood, the life we had didn't come in the form of Jesus, but in the form of ordinary humans, who were doing their best in a world that had given up on love—and had given up on them as well. And this giving up stretches back millennia to the moment that humans gave in to death in its myriad forms.

Jesus is the model of what life, and light, looks like when it hasn't been snuffed out by death. The "world" did not "recognize" him because our sight adjusts to the darkness, adjusts to death. Our life becomes a series of compromises and compensations for the ways that death brushed up against us or in some cases brutalized us, anointed our bodies, minds, and hearts and wrapped us in grave cloths.

If we're lucky, we hear the voice of the Nazarene echoing in the tomb of our lives, "Come out". Life wrapped us in grave cloths – all the slights we've endured from those we thought loved us, the failures we've never forgiven ourselves for, the shame, the second chances that came our way but we let slip by, the dreams that enlivened us and quickened our hearts, but whose fire we neglected to tend, the meagre portion of love we've settled for, all the playing it safe.

The voice that is the Light and Life is almost inaudible so deep is our slumber. We hear the grief in the beckoning voice. It is love's voice. When you hear it you recognize it as the voice you've been waiting for all your life. You understand that it's not possible to speak these words to yourself because the power of death, of self-judgment and condemnation has hi-jacked your vocal chords and your mind.

When the unravelling of death begins, naturally there's going to be a distinct stench. It's the stench of unlived life. But it's also the beginning of a new creation. You have been called by Life and by Light to return to the land of the living. Nothing will be taken for granted. You will surrender to the possibility of being born again and again to the great adventure of becoming.

John 11:32-44

11:32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

11:34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

11:35 Jesus began to weep

11:36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

11:38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

11:39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

11:40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

11:41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.

11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

11:43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!"

11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go."

Now My Eyes See You



Jusepe de Ribera

Increasingly I find myself keeping my mouth shut about things that I don't actually know. This is particularly difficult when I think I have a good *idea* about something. But I've been around long enough to get that good ideas are a dime a dozen. I hate to admit it because I have the kind of mind that generates streams of ideas, some of them pretty darn good. Especially after I've had caffeine. I fall in love with my ideas.

And to be fair with myself, some of them turn out to have more correspondence with truth than others.

Now I have stepped unwittingly into some very deep philosophical waters. From Kant forward most conventional philosophy persuades us that we can't know reality in itself. We can only know reality through the subjective personal and cultural lens we all inevitably wear. And I get this. Spiral Dynamics and Integral philosophy are premised on the reality of these filters—emergent orders of consciousness and cultural waves of development—that determine not only *what* we see, but how we see it and interpret it. All true.

And yet, ultimately I'm with philosopher and esotericist, Rudolph Steiner and his mentor, German philosopher, scientist, poet, and playwright, Goethe. Both of these men challenged Kant's premise that reality, in itself, is unknowable. They were both mystics in their own way, and knew humans to be on a continuum with the reality that we perceived out there. There is an inherent unity between humans and the natural world. And we are that aspect of reality which, on behalf of whatever natural phenomenon we focus our attention, is able to know the thing and know it for real. In fact, when we learn the art of seeing and knowing (which itself takes considerable discipline), our ideas about the thing we are perceiving is the thing thinking itself-through us! It's the thing itself which now has the capacity to know itself through thought-our thought. This is the unitive way of knowing.

Okay so what's this got to do with the reading from Job and blind Bartimaeus? Job knew G_d in a particular way prior to being stripped of everything he and his contemporaries associated with divine blessing:

42:5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear...

He had inherited, as we all have, other people's ideas about G_d. And through the cultural lens of traditionalism, everybody knew that G_d rewarded good behaviour and punished bad behaviour. Except that Job called bullshit on the whole arrangement. He trusted his own experience. And when you start trusting your own experience, the priests and religious authorities, and the members of traditional society start freaking out, warning you, admonishing you, shaming you. But the genius of Job was his willingness to challenge the traditional religious mindset.

His capacity to resist the pressure of his society is remarkable. Read the story again. He refused to fold in the face of immense pressure. In doing so he built sufficient

tension to allow the evolutionary pressure for transcendence to build. This might be the first religious treatise to directly challenge the very tradition that included it in its canon. It anticipates the emergence of the modernist mindset in fact.

But something else happened as well. Coming around to G_d's point of view did not mean giving up his new understanding that the divine economy of G_d as rewarder and punisher was wrong. This insight was hard gained wisdom based in his own intuitive interpretation of his experience.

As the text says:

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

This kind of vision is a direct knowing. Again, what he knew was not that he was wrong. He hadn't been bullied into giving up new wisdom – wisdom which Jesus subsequently validated generations later: "G_d makes the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and unjust".

What causes Job to repent was that he saw for himself that this divine intelligence that is living us and living the entire universe is infinitely complex, beyond all our rational attempts to understand its ways. You can experience it, know it, devote yourself to it if you are spiritually inclined, but not with the rational faculty alone.

My few brushes with this Mystery left me speechless. Well, to be perfectly honest, there were two words that I repeated over and over again for a few hours. F*** me! It certainly left me knowing that I did not know much, and that the best response to It/Him/Her was to hold still long enough for this intelligence to make something of me.

Now I realize that at a deeper level we are expressions of

this intelligence, but my hunch is that It shows up as infinitely more than and completely Other than us, during the stage when our arrogant ego still reigns. For some, like, me, this stage can last a life time. Who knows, maybe lifetimes?

But this is the true seeing, the spiritual seeing, I believe that the story of Job is telling and what the story of blind Bartimaeus is also about. We all know the cry of Bartimaeus to see again. We've all been blinded, especially in the 21st century, by philosophical materialism (reducing all reality to a flatland), rationalism (reducing humans to calculative logicians) and economic fundamentalism (reducing the human soul to little more than an economic unit, setting money up as a god).

"My teacher, let me see again.

The blind man "throws off his cloak" and springs up to meet this healer. What cloak is it that is blinding you? What needs to be thrown off?

Job 42:1-17

42:1 Then Job answered the LORD:

42:2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

42:3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

42:4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.'

42:5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

42:6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and

ashes.”

42:10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

42:11 Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.

42:12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys.

42:13 He also had seven sons and three daughters.

42:14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.

42:15 In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.

42:16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations.

42:17 And Job died, old and full of days.

10:46-52

10:46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

10:47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

10:48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out

even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

10:49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

10:50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

10:51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."

10:52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

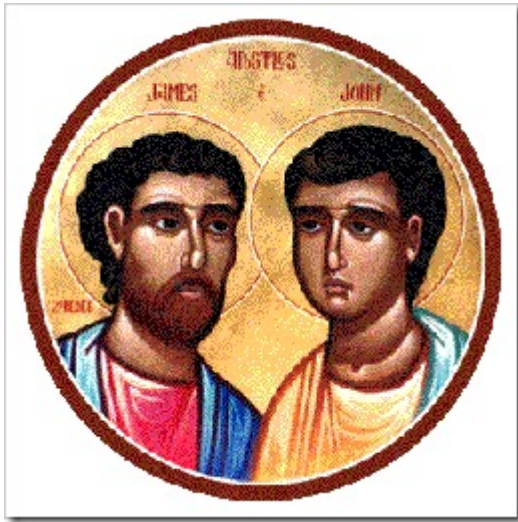
Jeremiah 31:7-9

31:7 For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."

31:8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

31:9 With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

The Sons of Thunder



They weren't called the "sons of Thunder" for no reason. They were the ones who, when given a hard time by some Samaritans responded fiercely:

"When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?'" (Luke 9:54).

Maybe they enjoyed a little excess testosterone. They exhibit, in this passage and in today's reading, some prototypical alpha male behaviour, which is associated, according to modern research with high levels of the male hormone.

Jesus is okay with it. He doesn't condemn them for asking what they want from him—to be seated at Jesus' right and left hand in glory. Guess they planned to arm wrestle later to see who got to be at the privileged right hand.

But this isn't like getting appointed to the Senate in Canadian parliament. Jesus isn't the PM and he apparently can't make appointments. Only those "for whom it has been prepared" get to share in the glory.

By which is meant, only those who are ready to "drink the cup" that Jesus has drunk, and be baptized with the baptism with which Jesus will be baptized. Which is to say, those who are prepared to undergo the same kind of ordeal.

We aren't told exactly what that means, but we can be pretty certain that it includes learning to love a world that is so twisted by violence, hatred, and pettiness that it has come to believe that this is the real world. It includes "giving your life as a ransom" for many. This sounds like the suffering servant from the Isaiah reading in today's lectionary. And of course, this is a non-starter with most liberal Christians. But I suspect that there is something to it.

Even at the level of martyrdom, it's possible that Jesus had to step up and take Rome's violence, acting as a scapegoat so that the Empire would lay off his friends. But as I've written elsewhere I think there is also something to Jesus acting shaman-like to draw from the world all of the world's darkness and metabolize it so that the darkness can be brought to the light, seen for what it is, and ultimately redeemed.

The other disciples are royally pissed with the sons of Thunder, but the brothers are simply revealing the nature of all human beings, including the other disciples', when we live separated from the Divine Heart and Mind. The ego defines success as being on the receiving end of other people's service. The capitalist system is basically set up as a societal projection of this impulse and orientation.

The alternative orientation is being in service to something bigger than oneself, one's security, etc. But being in service doesn't mean neglecting self or living joylessly. I was listening to Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love* and *Big Magic*) on CBC. She made an interesting point that "all" we need to do is to do what our soul is here to do, and that is love, and love always transcends self-focus. In a sense it is the disappearance or the dissolving of self as soul simply does what it came to do. It might look like "service to others". But it's actually simply the realization of soul in a world that is looking for the same thing.

Some humans get to the point in this lifetime when they

realize that nothing else actually matters. These are the ones, in Jesus' words, "for whom it has been prepared". Who knows why? Maybe it's taken these folks many reincarnations. Or maybe their own suffering in this lifetime has broken them open, when for others it has shut them down.

But it's not actually an achievement. It's a destiny that has unfolded. The time is right. You are prepared to suffer for love, live for love, die for love. Because love is the ground of reality and love is where it's all heading. This is our glory, and the glory of the human condition. This we do, not for ourselves, but as the crowning achievement of a cosmic evolutionary process on behalf of the emerging Human. This is the glory that awaits all of us.

Mark 10:35-45

10:35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

10:36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

10:37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

10:38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

10:39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;

10:40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

10:41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

10:42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

10:43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

10:44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

10:45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

[Living Naked](#)



A friend of mine who attended a ceremony with me had a vision. He was passing through a narrow gate. On the other side was the secret of life laid bare. He was very excited. He was about to walk joyfully through, when a voice said to him: “What is that in your hand?” He said that it was his new book that he had

just finished and was about to go to print. He was quite proud of the book. It had taken him a long time to write. The voice told him, “If you want to go through the gate, put the book down and pass through without it”.

Then the voice told him why. “That book is a collection of all of your ideas over the years. You wrote it for yourself. But it’s not for the world. It is serving your ego.

It might sound a little harsh, but he knew immediately that it was true.

10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

10:22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

I don't know what the man in the parable meant by "inheriting eternal life", but it probably had something to do with the reward you expect in the next life for being good in this one. This is reward/punishment belief is central to a traditional religious worldview.

His attachment to his wealth was keeping him from the inheritance he wanted to receive. He had already done the "good" part by keeping all the commandments. Being a "good" Christian (or Jew, Muslim, Hindu) is easy for anybody with a decently developed will. It even wins you approval in the community at large.

But being good doesn't get at, and in fact, can act to conceal, the underlying/unconscious issues—the heart and soul of the matter. This is typically the truth of what are we actually putting our trust in. The man was functioning from his personality, not his soul.

The personality, as I've written before, is the compensated self, the way we learn to adapt ourselves to the world after we discovered that the world can not be trusted—trusted to provide, trusted to love unconditionally, trusted to draw our innate radiance and creativity, trusted to be *for* me.

A love of money is nothing more than on form of distrust. When

the chips are down, so to speak, we'll fall back on the security of money. The entire Western capitalistic system as it is now manifesting is a global, systemic agreement that Earth as Mother cannot be trusted to provide for our needs. The 1 % who hold __% of the wealth in the U.S., for example, refuse to allow the wealth to flow through and back into the economy, and back into Earth in a way that is sustainable. The wealthy are getting wealthier, and the political system is increasingly serving them, because they built a dam and refuse to allow the river of natural wealth to flow. They are clinging to it in off-shore tax-free havens and other tax exempt loopholes that their lawyers get paid to dream up.



These folks might be “good” people, they might have “kept all the commandments”, but they aren’t going to get through the spiritual gate with all their wealth. They are going to have to leave it outside the gate.

Ultimately, the crisis comes down to whether we can trust the universe/G_d/Earth, our loved ones, our communities to be for us. When we don’t believe it we accumulate surrogates and cling to them, like my friend clung to his book.

He’d have to say for himself what the book represented. But my hunch is that it represented himself, his ego, his very identity. To his credit, he did put the book down. He’s not getting it published. He is going to have to discover who he is when he is not identified with his personality and all the ways that the book sustained his ego.

When we actually put down those things that keep us from trusting that G_d/Life/Universe is *for* us, that’s when things

get really interesting. By interesting I mean terrifying.

This is why Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that following him required that they take up the cross and die with him. Now he may have meant that literally, but I suspect that he meant that who we thought we were before we heard him invite us to radically trust “the Father” needed to go to the cross. Everything that is not our essential nature, that is not love, that lives in fear that we are not loved, not good enough, not worthy—all that stuff that makes us work so hard and be so vigilant to prove we *are* worthy, etc.. Drop it.

Inheriting eternal life may not be so much about the life to come, but rather experiencing what it’s like to truly trust and live from soul in *this* life. We’ve accumulated a lot of baggage on this journey through life born of distrust. Each of us is a camel hoping to fit through the eye of a needle. It’s not just a matter of trimming the load. It’s a matter of dropping the load.

Living naked. Discovering that when you love love, then love loves you too (Cockburn). Moving when it’s time to be moved—like the wind. As a nomad. Finding stillness when the whole world is racing madly off in all directions. Being ridiculously generous. Grieving like an orphan for all who long to come home. Belly laugh just because. Live in freedom. Refuse to be pigeon-holed.

Drop the weight of your whole personality and enter into the eternal life of the soul.

Mark 10:17-31

10:17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

10:18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

10:19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

10:20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

10:22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

10:24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

10:26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

10:28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

10:29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,

10:30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”