

Rally Day?

By Rev. Joe Connolly

{Wisdom says:} “How long, O simple ones, / How much longer, you ignorant people, / will you love being simple, being ignorant? / How much longer, O you who mock others, / will you continue to mock, delight in your mocking? / How much longer will you fools / hate knowledge, sneer at understanding?”
— Proverbs 1:22.

I want to start my comments today by mentioning a couple of obvious items or things you probably know. First as I have often said here, my upbringing was in the Roman tradition. Second, today is our “Rally Day.”

This so called “Rally Day” is something noted or celebrated in many Protestant churches at this time of year. “Rally Day” is the label often given to the first day of the Fall Term of a Christian Education program.

Third, if you said to someone involved in the Roman tradition that a specific day is “Rally Day” for a church, they would have no idea what you meant. Hence given my upbringing, it was not until I joined and became active at a church in the Protestant tradition that I had any idea something called “Rally Day” even existed.

As to why “Rally Day” is not an event in the Roman tradition, to a certain extent American history is the culprit. You see, less than 150 years ago if you were a participant in the Roman tradition you were considered at best a second class citizen.

The unintended consequence of Catholics being socially ostracized was they organized their own educational system. The schools they established ranged from High Schools to Universities to Grade Schools, just like Holy Family School right here in town. Therefore given their own education apparatus, there was little need for an education start date in church.

That a Fall term would happen, that education would happen, was a given in those established schools. Hence, why mark something assumed? I would be remiss if I did not point out similar social ostracization in the 1920s eventually led to the educational institutions established by churches on the right.

For me personally, I ascribe the reason that I never heard about “Rally Day” to information myopia. I was not privy even to the idea of a Fall commencement for a Church School term. I had no idea a “Rally Day” even existed.

Which is also to say sometimes information myopia can come from being ostracized. But there are many flavors of myopia about information, about facts.

Information myopia can come from, pardon the expression, willful ignorance. Make believe something does not exist even if it’s staring you in the face— that’s willful ignorance.

As to the other flavors of ignorance— it often comes from other forms of isolation— physical or self-

imposed or social or economic or cultural isolation. Of course, information myopia can come simply from a lack of curiosity on the part of an individual. A lack of curiosity—to a certain extent that is self-imposed isolation. (Slight pause.)

In a recent article Psychiatrist Alfred Margulies says curiosity is necessary for a stable individual. “Wonder...” meaning a sense of curiosity, “...wonder promotes a searching attitude of simultaneously knowing and not knowing.”

Wonder blends astonishment with curiosity, a winsome combination that ends up fostering deep appreciation of the other. Indeed, wonder and curiosity keep us from behaving as if we have other people figured out for indeed, we do not have other people figured out.

Children can be exemplars of curiosity, of wonder. Further, I think it’s informative that the questions children pose may have as much to do with relationship as with acquiring new information. For instance, when a child asks an adult, “Why do grown-ups sometimes cry when they are happy?”— yes, the child is seeking information.

But the child is not *just* seeking information. The child is asking for and seeking interaction and attention. A response is sought.

It’s clear a relationship is at stake in the very question. If an adult squelches that kind of “why” inquiry, relationship gets thwarted. Therefore, I want to pose the idea that curiosity is often about relationship.

Here’s an example of that from Scripture. We have labeled the disciple known as Thomas as “Doubting.” But “Doubting Thomas” is not the name of Thomas. The name applied to Thomas is *Didymus*— the twin. And this episode is commonly described as being about doubt. But the word doubt cannot be found anywhere in that passage.

So, when Thomas asks the resurrected Christ to see and touch the wounds, is that about proof? I think not.

Rather, the scene opens doors to relationship. And that relationship will require all kinds of personal change, relational change. What Thomas does display in this episode is holy curiosity. And yes, curiosity is holy. [1] (Slight pause.)

These words are found in the work known as Proverbs: {Wisdom says:} “How long, O simple ones, / How much longer, you ignorant people, / will you love being simple, being ignorant? / How much longer, O you who mock others, / will you continue to mock, delight in your mocking? / How much longer will you fools / hate knowledge, sneer at understanding?” (Slight pause.)

One of the things we need to notice in these words is they are proclaimed into the very heart of the city of the people of God. This is a public proclamation. It is not a proclamation of an individual truth, a proclamation of how one person might see things.

It is a public proclamation, a public call to everyone, for everyone to heed. Wisdom declares this Word is from God is to be heard. Wisdom bids everyone to listen. This, thereby, is a proclamation to all

people to enter into dialogue with God.

This public proclamation invites everyone to examine how God might see the world. It is a proclamation to understand the nature of reality not as we see it but as it is created by *Yahweh*, God.

How will that happen? How does that happen? It happens through dialogue with God and through dialogue with one another, each of us a child of God.

Since this is an invitation to examine how God might see the world it is a summons to both curiosity and to relationship. Curiosity and relationship intertwined are at the core of this proclamation.

Is this passage also a prophetic accusation, a prophetic condemnation? No. The only real condemnation here is when and if the people condemn themselves by ignoring God's teachings, being willfully ignorant of God's teachings.

Of course, what that also and really means is *we* are in control. *We* have the ability to learn. So, how are we in control? (Slight pause.)

We are in control because this teaching is an invitation. This teaching is an invitation to participate, an invitation to be in relationship with God, an invitation to be in relationship with each other. I would be as bold as to suggest that to enter into relationship, to be in this kind of dialogue, is a sign of spiritual maturity. (Slight pause.)

That brings me back to the fact that this is "Rally Day." As I said, "Rally Day" is the label often given to the first day of the Fall Term of a Christian Education program. But why? (Slight pause.)

I think somewhere along the line Christian educators caught on to the fact that this passage and others sound to many like accusations. So offering an alternative way to look at this was a good idea.

Further, the more traditional word—repent—and repent does not mean remorse—it means to turn toward God—the more traditional word 'repent' did not seem to fit either. Hey! It's repent day! (I don't think so.) So the word rally was chosen.

You see, one of the definitions of the word 'rally' is to reverse a period of weakness—*reverse a period of weakness*. So Christian educators are saying let's rally, let's get back with the program, folks! Let's turn toward God and God's teachings.

However, I also want to suggest the deeper issue is one I've addressed many times, one discussed in the last verse of the reading. (Quote:) "...those who *listen* to me / will be secure, / those who *listen* to me will be at peace; / those who *listen* to me / will live at ease, will have quiet, / will have no dread of disaster."

The word listen is repeated three times. And what is the great commandment, the *Shema*? Hear, O Israel. When we do not listen to God we break covenant.

And to what is covenant call us? Growth—covenant is a commitment to growth, a commitment to not

be in any way myopic. Covenant is a commitment to change, a commitment to learn, a commitment to move on, a commitment to relationship— tall order that. Amen.

09/16/2018

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ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “Earlier I mentioned the episode we commonly call “Doubting Thomas.” It is Jesus who invites Thomas to examine the wounds. Again, this is not about proof. This is about the invitation of Christ to relationship, and thereby it is an invitation to movement, to change, to growth.”

BENEDICTION: We are called to care, even when conventional wisdom says we should not. God is our helper. Christ is our teacher. The Holy spirit is our guide. Let us go forth knowing that the grace of God is deeper than our imagination, the strength of Christ is stronger than our need and the communion of the Holy Spirit is richer than our togetherness. May God guide and sustain us today and in all our tomorrows. Amen.

[1] The last eight paragraphs are adapted from an article in *the Christian Century* (9/12/18) by Peter W. Marty, Curiosity Is Holy.