

The Communicator October 22 Addendum

In addition to forgetting to attach Gillian's sermon to The Communicator (as promised) I have received several corrections.

Divine Dog Calendars are priced at 200 pesos.

The donated oven was given by Dennis Banks.

The Alexander Method class with Rosie Land is at 11 on Wednesdays.

And from Pat Manners: All items donated by a person can be put in one plastic bag - not individually bagged as stated in the newsletter.

The Reverend Gillian Ball will be with us not only November 10 for Remembrance Day but November 3 for All Souls when we will also celebrate Day of the Dead.

Gillian's Homily.

(Celtic) **Your love is as high as the heaven, O God; your faithfulness soars through the skies.
Your righteousness reaches the towering peak; your justice the depths of the sea.
We shelter beneath your wings; we feast on the food you provide.
We open our eyes to drink in your goodness; for you are the source of all life,
and because of your light we see light.**

Reflection: When we read the news, we seem to be constantly hit with the word "power" or with demonstrations of power in various contexts. Power generally speaks of control over people and the environment. Power can be political or financial. It can be spiritual in the sense of notable church leaders. It can pertain to stardom. It thrives and is found at the top of any hierarchy. Powerful people draw others to them. Admirers want to be photographed with them, seen with them, and generally praise them. Others want to attack them. Somehow power cannot be resisted. There is something about it that makes people feel that they will gain something from it.

This fascination with power has been part of humanity since our inception. We just have to read history to learn that this is nothing new. We think of authoritative Caesars of the Roman Empire, leaders in the Middle Ages, emperors or the earlier divine rights of kings, the force of the Church, the power displayed by certain invaders of lands, the turmoil and horrific reigns of Hitler, Stalin, and present day dictators, the corruption that inevitably arises from too much influence and authority, the belligerence and control that too often leads to the formation of autocracies and despotism.

There is a deep yearning in some people to attain absolute rule over others. And at times, the powerless attain power to become as ruthless as their predecessors. There is a quest to pull power out from under others in order to sit at head tables all over the world. This often results in the eternal hope of most people to have enlightened leaders who can triumph without falling victim to corruption. We elect them as the kind of leaders we want to sit at tables and make proper decisions for the world. Those are the ones who seek "*not to be served but to serve*".

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In a lesser way, we see this attraction to power in the minds of Christ's disciples. In today's Gospel passage they are asking Jesus to respond to their desire to remain close to him when the Kingdom arrives with glory. They want places of honour. Despite the warnings of Jesus about his upcoming suffering and death, it just does not register. Despite the storms hovering on the horizon, they push aside the bad news they don't want to heed. They perceive a special power within this leader. They sense victory and they want to share it with Christ. They feel this will give them special positions within his circle. After all, they are the ones who are closest him, who have followed him, who have gone out on missions for him. It doesn't seem to be an unreasonable request.

But Jesus urgently speaks of a new reality. It is not a pleasant one. "*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?*", he asks. Are you willing to "*be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*" Far too readily they answer him that they are able to do this. They have little concept of what Christ is telling them. They believe in a new world under a new leader with all evil people removed and the world redeemed once and for all.

Yet again, Jesus tries to impress on them the truth of what is facing him and what will affect them severely in the time to come. The new world that he envisions is not the one they envisage - it is slated to turn everything upside down. It offers a simple rule that decrees that the powerful ones are not those at the head of the table but the humble ones who are attending to those at table. The powerful are not the dignitaries but servers doling out food and stirring pots in the kitchen. Christ reminds them that he did not come into the world to be served but to serve others and be willing to sacrifice his life in the attempt to teach this new way of being for the sake of a gentler society.

This desire of the disciples to be given places of honour brings to mind a story that I read about British Bernardo orphans brought out to Canada. Some were very well treated. Others were not. I am always sorrowfully touched at the recollection of two small children being forced to sit on the stairs, while the family ate at table, and had to wait to be fed the scraps and leftovers. The unfeeling treatment of two bewildered youngsters sent out to work on a farm is heart breaking. But it is also a reality in a wider world of many who are denigrated by the more powerful and the selfish who refuse them a place at the table.

We keep getting reminded by Jesus that the best place is the lowest place - the place on the stairs. He teaches us that those who serve are more fortunate than those who revel in power. This seems incomprehensible in the society we live in. It is one that holds far too many standards that oppose those of Christ's. Some see servanthood as a testing time - do the serving and hope for better things to come. But Jesus, again, warns that this is not the way to perceive servanthood in his name. This is a vocation to be carried out for the love of God and to be ministered to those in need throughout one's lifetime.

Having great power is not usually what it is held up to be. It is too often an uneasy throne. We can reflect on kings and tyrants overthrown, emperors defeated, tsars losing sovereignty, leaders assassinated, many looking over their shoulders for the next possible threat. None of this power lasts for a thousand years - inevitably the harsh grip is loosened and the throne topples. Perhaps it is good to be reminded of this when we feel despair over misused power and the striving for power by those who wish to do harm to others. Perhaps it also curtails our personal longing for a position of power in the mistaken belief that it can bring happiness and a sense of accomplishment. It is a human instinct to seek some kind of leadership role so we should not be too hard on ourselves. But when we find ourselves with certain responsibilities, we are encouraged to work with others and not against them, to work with humility rather than arrogance.

Christ's power in the end can overcome worldly power. His example of serving, feeding, healing, giving of himself for us is the kind of power he offers. The world is indeed transformed when Christians and others work on behalf of the vulnerable, take care of the sick, feed the hungry, encourage the despairing. We know how deeply touched we are by any account in the news of those who respectfully uphold others, help those in need, rescue those in danger, heal the scarred and wounded. Such compassion touches our hearts and often brings tears to our eyes. This is the kind of evocative power that is well worthwhile for it makes life meaningful and consequential.

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The power to serve is ultimate power. Power is not necessarily evil. Those in positions of political or financial power can do much to free our world of desolation and futility. Their power can provide homes and food and education and promise. Their power can salvage our planet from destruction. Spiritual power can provide imagination and hope and strength. It can bring relief and comfort to those in distress. The power of stardom can bring attention to societal injustice and help to change attitudes that generate discrimination and hatred. The power to serve in any way is indeed good power and can instigate “good trouble” (to quote John Lewis).

Few of us have any real power in comparison to world leaders. We feel limited and ineffectual as we face the wrongs of our world. But each person is given a grain of power from God which can be used for the good of others. It is the mustard seed all over again. Rather than using what bit of power we have to control others, we can use it to show concern for others. We can help, uphold, sympathise, feed, donate to good causes, visit the lonely, tend the sick, empathise with the suffering. We are capable of feeling compassion. We can sacrifice our time and our personal desires to care when needs arise. And so I pray that each one of us can upend the question of the disciples “*Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you*” to “*Teacher, we want to do for you whatever you ask of us.*” **Amen**

(Presbyterian) **Lord Jesus Christ, we expect that you will do what we want, whatever we ask. We want places of honour and all the glory. We want to be great. We want to be first. But you, O Christ, are servant of all. Forgive our brazenness. Forgive our self-importance. Forgive us. Teach us to be humble. Teach us to be more like you. Amen**

Affirmation: *(Celtic)* **In the midst of hunger and war, we celebrate the promise of plenty and peace. In the midst of oppression and tyranny, we celebrate the promise of service and freedom. In the midst of doubt and despair, we celebrate the promise of faith and hope. In the midst of fear and betrayal, we celebrate the promise of love and life. In the midst of sin and decay we celebrate the promise of salvation and renewal. We celebrate the promise of the living Christ. Amen.**

Intercessions: *(C of E)* **Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need. You gather the church into a community of mercy and grace. Unify Christians around the globe in efforts to proclaim good news even in the face of opposition and to protect those whose lives are imperiled by the gospel. You create the entire universe and call it good. Hinder those who would cause further destruction to our planet's fragile ecosystems and augment the calls of those who advocate for thoughtful stewardship of the earth's resources. You raise up leaders committed to love and justice. Nurture in those who govern, patience to receive criticism, openness to new ideas, and courage to change course when needed for the sake of the common good. Shield those endangered by domestic violence. Uphold those who are ill or grieving. You kindle faith that moves us into action. Guide children and adults preparing for baptism or confirmation. Empower Sunday school teachers and parents who share their faith with younger generations. Give us all a renewed sense of vocation. We give thanks for those whose labours on earth are ended and who now rest with you. On the final day, gather all of us, with them, in your loving arms. Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ. **Amen.****

(John van de Laar) **There are so many people of influence in our world, Jesus, Those with loud voices and deep pockets, those with large lives and wide networks. But where are the leaders? As we struggle to keep our broken humanity from splintering into countless irreparable fragments; As we wrestle with our greed and arrogance, our ignorance and short-sightedness, our violence and coldness, our carelessness and narcissism, Where are the leaders?**

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Raise up for us, O God, leaders worthy of the name, men and women who like Christ are unafraid of challenge, unashamed of serving, and unattached to their own personal gain; men and women who like Christ call to the best within us, and then lead the way. And, in our own small spheres, God, may we be the leaders we seek. Amen.

(Christian Aid) God with us, when we privilege our own agendas, hurt others in the effort to impose our will, or chain ourselves to our fears, tumble us off the throne of our pride, and release us into finding our worth in your love. Lord Jesus Christ, you know us, you love us, you free us, then call us to follow you and we bless you. Your mercy meets us in our confusion; may your spirit meet us in our everyday living. Amen

(Anne Osdieck) Can you drink the cup that I drink? Can we drink of your cup? Can we do what you do? No.

Not on our own; we think not. But through you, with you, in you: Yes. If you give us the grace. Let us come along with you. Amen

Blessing: *(Presbyterian)* Christ has come to turn the world upside down:
to humble the powerful and to lift up the lowly.

Christ has come to turn the tables: to topple vain idols and to stand with the poor.

Christ has come to proclaim God's Kingdom.

Christ has come to turn the world upside down: to overthrow the present order with a revolution of love.

+And the blessing of our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life be with us now and always. **Amen.**

