

What's Going On
Third Sunday of Easter, Year B
Psalm 4, Acts 3:19-20, 1 John 3:1-6, Luke 24:36-48
Rev. Stephanie Bekhor
April 19th, 2015

Marvin Gaye said it well in his mega-hit 1971 single about the world's troubles. His advice? Talk to me:

"Talk to me, so you can see, Oh, what's going on, What's going on, Yeah, what's going on, Ah, what's going on!"

The psalmist is also troubled, albeit for different reasons. He's got things on his mind, and they keep him up at night. He writes, "I will both lie down *and* sleep...in peace" (4:8). You get the feeling that he or she spent many nights lying in bed awake or sleeping fitfully.

His counsel to his community is similar to Gaye's but with one crucial addition: ponder what's going on, which is another way of saying, "sit with your fear, still your mind and talk to God."

Jesus did this, especially those nights he would like wake from sleep while it was still dark out and go to a quiet place to pray. His last night on earth, stripped of peace, he couldn't sleep, pleading with the Father to remove his cup of death.

Fear or dread is enough to keep anyone awake at night.

A story goes: Death was walking toward a city one morning and a man asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm coming for 100 people."

"That's horrible!" the man said, and he hurried to warn everyone he could.

As evening fell, he met Death again. "You told me you were coming for 100 people," the man said. "Why did you take 200?"

"I didn't; worry did."

To those who are anxious or worried, the psalmist says: "do not sin; ponder it on your bed, and be silent."

What unusual counsel for one who is anxious. Then again, when we are anxious, the temptation is to find relief anywhere we can. To ponder *it*—one’s situation, one’s heart, one’s motives, whatever “it” is—requires a certain degree of “stillness,” so God might penetrate our hearts.

You might not be able to "stay silent on your beds"—you might need to get up, go for a walk around the block—even in the middle of the night!—or just make yourself a cup of tea and sit in your favorite chair. Resist the TV or computer. Allow yourself a few minutes alone with God.

“Hello, God,” you might say. “Wee Betty here.”

You feel a little silly, as though God doesn’t know who you are.

“I can’t sleep, God.”

And that may be all you say. Or not.

To ponder, which is not the same as to dwell on or to drown in, is to reflect; there is stuff to deal with.

Growing up, one of my favorite Sesame Street videos was about Bert and Ernie “going on a bear hunt”: “Going on a bear hunt; we’re not afraid.”

As the duo searches for bears they encounter obstacles: a big lake, a dense forest, and they chant: “can’t go over it, can’t go under it, can’t go around it, got to go through it!”

And Bert and Ernie and my friends and I would pretend we were swimming through the water or pushing aside branches, so we could continue our search for a bear.

I have to imagine the bear is a metaphor; who goes on a bear hunt?! The bear and the obstacles, it seems, are opportunities to deal with the challenges before us. With Bert and Ernie, I’ve come to realize that, to get anywhere, you’ve “got to go through it.”

In her novel, *Silver Star*, author Jeanette Walls suggests, through a mother’s advice to her daughter, Liz, that "going through it" can actually lead to “treasure.” Walls writes:

Mom said Liz shouldn’t fear the voices. That was how the mind and soul talked to each other, she said. When you argued with yourself, those were voices. When your conscience told you something was a bad idea that was a voice. When the muse whispered lyrics in your ear, it was a voice. Everyone heard voices, Mom said. Some of us just heard those voices more clearly than others. Listen to them, channel them, and turn them into music.

“Don’t be afraid of your dark places,” Mom told her. “If you can shine a light on them, you’ll find treasure there.” (p. 208).

Stephen Hawking would agree; an astrophysicist at Cambridge University and perhaps the most intelligent man on earth, Hawking is afflicted with ALS and has been confined to a wheelchair for years. He has lost the ability even to speak, and now he communicates by means of a computer that is operated from the tiniest movement of his fingertips.

Hawking said that before he became ill, he had very little interest in life. He called it a “pointless existence”. He drank too much and did very little work. Then he learned he had ALS and was not expected to live more than two years. The ultimate effect of that diagnosis, beyond its initial shock, was [surprising]. He claimed to have been happier after he was afflicted than before. How can that be understood? Hawking provided the answer.

“When one’s expectations are reduced to zero, one really appreciates everything that one does have.” To a man like Hawking who thought he would soon die quickly, everything takes on meaning—a sunrise or [a visit with a friend] or the laughter of children. Suddenly, each small pleasure becomes precious. (Dobson, James. New Man, October, 1994, p. 36)

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If you face the challenges before you, you just might find treasure there. The psalmist knew this, so do Stephen Hawking and Jeanette Walls. Even Bert and Ernie. And especially Jesus.

His troubles weighed as heavily on him as the cross he carried on his back; his friends had betrayed him in the way people do, and his people had handed him over as a traitor.

"Nobody knows the troubles I've... Nobody knows but Jesus."

I wonder: can we quiet ourselves for even a few moments, give ourselves the chance to see what's really going on and deal with it? Can we come to God with it and ponder it with Jesus, even in five-minute increments, until we hear Jesus' words to his anxious, fearful, burdened disciples: "Peace be with you."

And perhaps [take a deep inhale and exhale]...perhaps peace enters in, even for a moment.