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The Lectionary Readings for Sunday, August 11, are about Abraham, Faith, and 'thief in the night'. So funny that at Chair Yoga on Tuesday many remembered that OLD song about 'Father Abraham'.



**St. Augustine, Richmond has their festival August 9-11**

**St. John's New Baltimore, 'Spaghetti Dinner' this 2nd Saturday of the month 4-7:00**

**Music By the Bay Friday and Saturday in New Baltimore at the foot of Washington Street.**

**Congrats to Tom Hebel 'Volunteer of the Year' Richmond MI from First UCC at Forest and Main**

**Congrats to Primary winners in New Baltimore - current Mayor John Duprey & Ken Butler**

**Congrats to Price Smith new 'Music Minister' at First UCC Richmond - his energy and enthusiasm is wonderful**

Personally, the local happenings keep me engaged and give opportunity to meet new people on a regular basis. MCREST comes back to the New Baltimore area at St. John's on the 18th. Many consider that their ministry and go wherever **MCREST** goes. See you there!



**Scripture Reflection**

In February 2019, the president of the United States of America, declared a national emergency at the US-Mexico border. Such designation would allow a redirection of funding from the National Defense Department to the building of a border wall that would impede the growing number of migrants seeking entry into

America. As of May 2019, 19,000 of these migrants wait in border cities to seek asylum at ports of entry, fleeing violent conflict in their homeland. The cost of building a physical wall is estimated to total nearly \$60 billion. The environmental cost is inestimable and includes an increase in flooding and the compromise of the habitats of over 50 endangered species. The psychological cost is sobering, witnessed in the re-traumatizing of migrants as families are separated at the border, held in detention centers, and living in the fear of deportation. When I read this week's lectionary text, I am reminded that our country allocates fifty- two percent of its discretionary spending budget to national defence, and wonder what message this sends about the location and posture of the American heart.

This week's text places us in the midst of the "travel narrative" of Luke (9:51-19:27), as a growing caravan of followers walk alongside Jesus and learn from his teachings about discipleship on his way to Jerusalem. We enter a lesson chock-full of instruction for preparation:

- Sell your possessions...
- Give alms...
- Make purses...
- Be alert...
- Be ready...
- Be dressed for action...

The Revised Standard Version translates the last in this list as "let your loins be girded," a phrase appearing in other biblical passages as characters prepare to engage in confrontation. The long tunics donned at the time would have created a cumbersome obstacle for the quick, agile movements necessary in fighting or flight. A quick search online offers graphics of this choreography of garments. The act of girding involved first rolling up one's tunic, then weaving it through the legs, and finally either tucking the ends into a belt or tying them into a secure knot. Girding reduced the risk of tripping over one's garments, and allowed for greater mobility in work, travel, or battle.

The instruction to gird actually appears twice in the text. The master's slaves, who have vigilantly awaited their master's return from the wedding banquet, see him "fastening his belt" in preparation of serving them a meal. Turning to the original Greek of this passage reveals that the word chosen to describe the master's preparation for an encounter of service, perizonnyimi, is the same used to instruct Jesus's followers in how to prepare for his second coming. Not only is Jesus modeling a reversal of power in this illustration, but a complete reconfiguration of this well-known act of preparation. To gird ourselves for Jesus's coming is to free ourselves for service, removing whatever might trip us up.

Often, what trips us up most is fear. Again, I find it curious how Jesus describes his second coming. A thief in the night evokes responses of fear, and we have reason to believe Jesus may very well rob us of the false securities we cling to. The disciples are gradually becoming aware that there is risk involved in following Jesus; risk in the kingdom of God becoming realized on earth. As we see throughout the gospels, to encounter Jesus is to be met with a complete upheaval of life as we know it, of economics as we understand it, and of power differentials that we have come to take as a given.

From the very first verse, we hear from Jesus that we are not to fear. In fact, the proclamation "fear not!" appears throughout the Lukan gospel. They are the words spoken to Zechariah preceding the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:13), to Mary preceding the birth of Christ (1:30), to the shepherds in the field announcing Jesus's birth (2:10), at the calling of Simon Peter to discipleship (5:10), at the death of Jairus's daughter (8:50), and in Jesus's teachings of discipleship (12:7). Each of these moments brings new life. Each recognizes the fear of the unknown. Each is a preparation for an encounter with the holy.

Biblical scholar Karoline Lewis observes that "when the lack of

fear precedes our fear-driven desires for possessions, purchases, and procurements we might actually be able to imagine treasures beyond self-driven determination, self-assessed success, and self-obsessed security.” Our posture of defense collapses into one of service. Jesus provides another curious method of preparation which comes in his instruction to “make purses for yourselves that do not wear out” (Luke 12:33). There are echoes in today’s text of the disciples’ commissioning at the onset of their journey together (Luke 10:4). The disciples are to embark on their ministry of healing and preaching without bread, an extra tunic, money, or a purse (Luke 9:3). Absent of a purse, there is not even the means to carry possessions that would offer security on the journey. Their ministry is thus fully reliant on God and the hospitality of strangers. They cannot afford to put up walls between self and other, and their hearts follow suit. In this passage, Jesus assures us that the treasure of God’s kingdom is not locked away, shoved in the back of a closet and slowly deteriorating; it is accessible and among us in the exchange of generosity and nourishment, particularly with those at the margins whom Jesus girded himself to serve. This is not the kingdom determined by the powers and principalities of our world, who fuel anxiety and invest billions in support of defensive posturing. This kingdom is one in which we equip ourselves for encounters of service. This is a kingdom not contained within money bags or walls, not controlled by fear-driven desires for possessions and the false security they offer. This is a kingdom held by the ongoing work of stitching together communities that in themselves hold values of solidarity, trust, mercy, and love that is a risk worth taking. The Loving Kindness Meditation provides an opportunity to shift our inward posture toward self and others prior to the encounters we might anticipate with fear, anxiety, and suspicion. What might it look

like to pray for safety, health, ease, and happiness to fill these conflicted spaces, whether at work, in our families, in our churches, and in our civic and political engagement?

May I be free from inner and outer harm and danger. May I be safe and protected.  
May I be free of mental suffering or distress.  
May I be happy.  
May I be free of physical pain and suffering.  
May I be healthy and strong.  
May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully, with ease.



Just re-read a book by Thomas C. Reeves about Church from 1996 and am now looking to read *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming and Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out*. I find it amazing how we can’t learn by history but have to do a re-run of the mistakes, no matter information from science, the professionals. Humanity is stubborn and/or money hungry.

Thumbs Up to many, in spite of difficulties, who keep on keeping on. So glad that many remember you with cards and visits to Senior Living places and rehab areas. It is rewarding to see the extent of care and simple cards, phone calls, mini visits, that happen in this area. So many ‘walk-the-walk’ of Christianity; no lip service but action.

Dog Days of summer seem to have even the kids with less energy. At the park on Tuesday few were around and about, that is your’s truly’s ‘Prayer Walk’ time. When expressed to those I encounter, many will say “will you pray for \_\_\_\_\_” no shyness expressing the need of prayer. Sounds like a song! Engage at your local church this weekend.