



## Richmond Hill Reflections

“*Carpe Diem*” (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

August 11, 2019; Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Reading: Luke 12:31-38; Excerpt from *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor

I'm sure some of you have seen the bumper sticker: “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” Today’s story of Jesus telling his listeners to be like servants waiting for the head of the household to return reminded me of this, even though it is projecting theology of the rapture onto his words. While we don’t hold to this theology in the United Church, we do have a future focus and so might say “be loving today because it may be your last.” But is this Jesus’ point? We tend to place future orientation onto Jesus’ words, but I believe his focus was here and now, G-d’s realm not as a future heaven but living with heavenly values of love, compassion and justice. So what does it mean then to be dressed for action or to keep your lamps lit if it’s not about the second coming or being ready for a heavenly exit?

I think it’s a kind of *carpe diem*. From a quote by the Roman poet Horace, “seize the day” is a way of saying *yolo* – you only live once. I see an element of this not as “eat, drink and be merry” but in seeing every moment as *kairos*, as grace filled. Keep your lamps lit. Be awake to receive each holy moment. Be dressed for action. Do the most loving thing you can in the situation. Jesus speaks of waiting for the head of the household but talks of selling possessions and striving for the wholeness of creation as well. It’s realm of G-d language, lovingly receiving what’s before us and responding with the same love. This is what Barbara Brown Taylor is getting at: to “open your arms to what is, instead of waiting until it is what it should be... is to land at God's breast.” In every moment being open to the arrival of the householder, living in a spirit of blessing to everything around us.

It may seem selfish but openness to these moments starts with self-awareness. It is why meditative practice is important. I easily get caught up in what happened yesterday or will tomorrow and miss what’s in front of me. Case in point, I regularly walk in the forest on sermon writing day. It’s to be a grounding time but I often think about what I am going to say. The irony is that this week as I was thinking about writing about being in the moment, I wasn’t in the moment. I was on the computer in my head when all around me was blessing in dappled light and trees swaying in the breeze. This is why I need to take time each day in quiet, to focus on my breath, let go of yesterday, tomorrow, simply be. Walking Finley can help too. I can be in the moment as he stops everywhere to sniff.

Part of this is being receptive to my body like Finley is to his. I can get up in my head and don’t listen to what my body’s telling me. Overtired when I went on holiday, I still set tasks for me to do. Why? We need to be gentle to our bodies and appreciate them. After all we connect to others, to the divine through them. Psalm 139 says we are wonderfully made, so why is it all I see in the mirror is who I’m not instead of who I am, a miracle of skin, sinew and bone, doing everything it needs to without any thought on my part, each wrinkle a sign of experience? I need to be grateful for who I am right now and recognize that the holy I seek outside myself is within me as well.

The same gift is in every one of us and so I'm called to be attentive, to nurture holy moments in my relationships. What if I gave my dad my full attention? Really saw him? What if I put down my phone and listened to Glen with my eyes and heart? This extends to strangers too. Did you know that when you meet someone it takes under a minute to size up if they're "one of us" and we'll get along? Less than a minute to discount them because of how they look, tone of voice, how much they talk with their hands. Imagine if we dropped the filter, saw someone as gift, a moment of love and grace. What if I really saw them? What if I took the time to see a cashier as a person, not someone "working for me"? What if I saw past that, saw all her relationships, realized that through that moment of connection I too am someone's daughter, wife, mom? What if I saw someone on the street, gave him my attention, even if just for a second, to look past the terrifying demons to the bawling inside? How would I be different? Or him? What if I took time to consider the bawling inside the two teens from Port Alberni? Or did the same for a mass shooter? That's tough I know. But it's receiving *kairos*.

We need to do this, extending compassion wherever we can. As we extend attentiveness further outward, we start paying attention to people's situations too. We see the cashier is working two jobs because the autism funding for her son has been cut. We see the person on the street needs a home before he can tackle his addiction. We see the town a shooter comes from and realize their jobs have all been outsourced. Seeing people's contexts then motivates us to act. And we need to even though it's easy to withdraw, turn off the news, pretend it's a bad dream. We reach a saturation point after another mass shooting, or immigration raid, or racist diatribe. We want to distract our-selves, frustrated as one more politician sends "thoughts and prayers" and does nothing. But we can't just send thoughts and prayers. Not in the US and not here as we see a rise in gun violence. As we extend outward still, there is also a *kairos* moment in the crisis affecting the planet. Again, we can look away. That's what happened last spring when there were climate strikes held around the world, inspired by Greta Thunberg's school strikes. But in Toronto very few people showed up, me included. Fortunately, we have another opportunity in the week of September 20-27 when there's a General Climate Strike. What will you do? Will you leave work, or school, or whatever else you are doing and show our political leaders that something has to give? These are all *kairos* moments. What will you be doing in these moments when the head of the household comes?

In these troubling times it would be easy to choose a different way of living *carpe diem* - to "eat, drink and be merry" like there's nothing we can do, or do the opposite and focus on some future in heaven. But to my mind, Jesus invites us to be open to the grace and blessing of each moment - in what we each experience, in the people around us, as well as in responding to the situations we all face. It takes focus but that is the course I will try to follow. What will you do?