

Being formed into community—telling our stories into our fuller humanity
Romans 12:1-2
Meditation on thrones, living sacrifices, and jubilee

I've been looking at several images. One is a throne image, and the other an image of living sacrifices. And as I've been looking—sometimes up close to get all the detail and sometimes at a distance for perspective—I've begun to see glimpses of the ways these two images merge and paint a vision of jubilee.

The first image came to my attention with something Phil talked about last Sunday. He talked about the ways that the people of God, when they were in the wilderness, still had a mindset that enslaved them. They were no longer slaves...but still they were bound by their way of thinking and their way of making meaning. There was release for their bodies, if you will. They experienced one level of jubilee, but not a full or complete body/mind/spirit jubilee. And as Phil pointed out, we too in our time, have mindsets that trap and hold us.

So when I read the lectionary Texts for this week, Romans 12 caught my attention. I heard in the opening verses the ways that Phil is echoing Paul's words...or Paul echoing Phil. "Do not be formed by this world, by this time we're living in, but be transformed, be transfigured, by the renewing of the mind."

If we look closely at this image, there's something rather curious. You see the image of our minds being renewed—getting new mindsets. Having minds that see and think and make meaning in the same ways that we see Jesus seeing, thinking, and making meaning. A *jubilee* mindset—a way of thinking and meaning grounded in release, in letting go, in giving and forgiving. But the really curious and interesting detail is in the transformation. The transformation of the mind is visible here! We think of our minds being invisible, un-seeable. Yet here is an image of transfigured minds. Minds that are physical, material. Minds that are see-able. This detail is something for us to keep looking at, and returning to.

But I've gone directly to v 2. Let's look together at v 1: "I beg you, sisters and brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice." Paul is painting an image of our bodies as living sacrifices. What a bizarre image! Sacrifices are by nature, dead. Or about to be dead. Yet here is an image of a *living* sacrifice. Not a dead or dying one, but an alive, a standing up, a walking around sacrifice.

If we keep looking into this image we begin see in it, a reflection of Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Jesus. A living sacrifice.

This is an impossible image, isn't it? It doesn't fit into our binary way of thinking and making meaning. If something is dead, how can it be alive? If someone has been sacrificed, how can there be so much life and aliveness? If something has been taken, lost, given away...how can so much peace and well-being be possible? And yet, this is the image that the story of Jesus gives us.

To add further detail to this already intriguing and mystifying picture, let's look at thrones. A week ago at the Collaborators Conference, Jim and I listened to James Alison talking about his study of the Book of Revelation. He took us to chapter 4 where we are being shown a vision of heaven's throne room. It's a magnificent room and the worship and liturgy there are, quite simply, awe-some. And when we get to chapter 5, we see that it is the Lamb that is on the throne. The Lamb, "standing as one slain," is on the throne. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was killed. *And*, this Lamb is *not* dead but very much alive and on heaven's throne. A living sacrifice.

To make the image even more incredible, James pointed us to another throne vision, the one in Isaiah. And then the ones in Ezekiel and Daniel. This throne image becomes so dense and rich. As we gaze into these layered images, we see that these multiple images...are all from the same reflection. As that detail comes more and more into focus, we see that it is One God—the Holy, eternal One, the living God, Creator God, the slain Lamb—that has always been on the throne. That is, was, and will be on the throne. The Lamb has always been on heaven's throne, utterly alive, standing with His wounds, extending love and grace into the world. Extending mercy and healing. From the wounded hands of the Resurrected Jesus...flow release, forgiveness, liberation...jubilee. A living sacrifice.

From the beginning, the God we worship, the One who created us in God's image, is the holy, living sacrifice.

This is a vision to behold. A vision to keep our eyes on. This is not something to be understood; rather it is something for us to participate in. It is a way for us to engage our fully bodied beings, and for our bodies to be transfigured. And a primary way that we participate is in communion. As James Alison explains:

The Lamb standing as one slain is what we celebrate at communion.

Giving us the fruit of his self-giving up to death.

Turning us into ones who live his life.

When we eat the fruit of Jesus' self-giving up to death, we become what we eat.

We become—physically and materially—living sacrifices. Not dead sacrifices—we *become* living sacrifices. In communion, we *enter into the picture*, we become a part of God's living tableau, the new creation flowing from the throne: jubilee.

There are so many other details to see and contemplate. But for just a few more minutes, let's keep our eyes on the throne image, seeing the crucified and resurrected Lamb on the throne. See the Holy One, the Creator of the universe with Her hands reaching toward creation. From Her hands flow love and grace. From Her hands, forgiveness and healing are flowing into the world. See the wounded, risen, living One standing at the Table, serving us the fruits of His living sacrifice.

Surely this is a vision of *jubilee* to behold. In this jubilee vision, injustice and death, rivalry and violence, shame and guilt are being re-distributed. In this vision, the mindset founded on

death and the fear of death is being reset and renewed. When the Host at our communion table is the Lamb on heaven's throne, our very bodies begin to be changed. When Jesus, the Living Sacrifice, serves us from the fruit of his self-giving, we begin to see and know—in our muscles and in our bones—that dead is not dead. Rather, death is an entry into resurrection, into a fuller aliveness, a fuller humanity.

And here I am not talking about biological death, but the dyings that happen when there is loss and diminishment. The death that comes with losing my white privilege so that *all* people experience justice and equal access. The dying that happens so that I'm able to say when I'm wrong and then say, I'm sorry; can you forgive me. And the death of losing my position, or losing the things that have given my life meaning. This jubilee vision lets us see that beyond these deaths there is life and aliveness, a life and aliveness that rises up out of release, of letting go, out of giving and being forgiven.

With our eyes fixed on the Lamb of God on the throne, our transfiguration begins and deepens as we freely participate in jubilee. When our mindset is being formed by the Living Sacrifice, we are free to live into the fulness of our humanity, fearlessly loving, fearlessly demanding justice for all, fearlessly giving ourselves, fearlessly receiving. When we're being nourished and sustained by the fruits of Jesus' self-giving, our very bodies are being transformed—mind, body, spirit—as our muscles and joints and our thinking and our ways of making meaning are being reset by release, by jubilee.

May we behold in the dailiness of our lives, the Lamb of God on heaven's throne.
And may we become what we eat at the Lamb's Table.
May it be so.