

Today is the second Sunday After Christmas.

It's the tenth day of Christmas.

It's a day for lords to be a leaping!

We are, liturgically speaking, in a liminal moment.

And in between time.

Liminal comes from the Latin root for threshold.

It's a space of crossing over.

The Gregorian Calendar moves us from one year to the next.

The marketplace and the financial year does the same.

In all of these metrics, we have already crossed over something.

Many Christian worshipping communities will mark today, the Feast of the Epiphany.

Epiphany marks the arrival at the new following the longing and preparation of Advent

Epiphany is one of those feast days which is celebrated on a set number of days

12 days after Christmas

January 6

This means it only rarely falls on a Sunday.

2019 was the last time it did so.

2030 will be the next time.

So the second Sunday after Christmas often becomes the stand in for Epiphany

For those communities not prone to midweek services.

This year, it felt worthwhile

To hold on to the space between

The liminality

For one more week

And mark Epiphany next week

The readings this week may strike some as potential unusual

And for some, they hold a liminal space within the sacred writings of the Christian Tradition

The Book of Sirach

Also known as Ecclesiasticus

Or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach

And the Wisdom of Solomon

Might be lesser known

Some might note that they aren't in the Bible as it is known to some

But these are in fact the appointed readings from the Revised Common Lectionary

And Voices United, the Hymn Book of the United Church of Canada

Does in fact include responsive and sung settings for this text

Both of these books are part of a collection of writings known often as

The Apocryphal or Deuterocanonical Books

This means that these books were included in the Septuagint the Ancient Greek Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that appears in and about the 3rd century BCE.

These books would also have been included in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible that emerges in around the 4th Century CE which initially uses the Greek Septuagint rather than direct Hebrew Translations of Hebrew Scriptures.

And while these books are generally considered to be canonical, a biblical terms akin to official

In the Roman Catholic Bible

The Jewish Scriptures

And Protestant "Old Testament"

Do not include them

Apocrypha means "hidden things" and in antiquity that generally meant that writings which were categorized as such were restricted either because they were considered too esoteric or profound for anyone but the already initiated or simply heretical or spurious, false teaching.

This designation sometimes gives these particular writings a bit of baggage.

As someone who spent significant time in fundamentalist communities, there's still this voice somewhere in my mind that balks at opening these books.

As if there is something taboo, or verboten in reading them.

Perhaps others of certain backgrounds might feel the same.

Many modern scholars feel that Apocrypha is simply the wrong word

Because these writings simply don't meet the aforementioned description.

Now there are certainly some aspects of these writings which witness to perspectives that while contained within the canonical scriptures may not always be as emphasized.

The explicit connection of wisdom with feminine divinity is absolutely present in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, but the connection is more pronounced in Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon.

These two Ancient pieces of Wisdom literature, are paired by the Lectionary with the opening of the Gospel of John.

This is one of the readings traditionally appointed for Christmas Eve.

Which makes it worthwhile to ponder 10 days later

When the excitement of that night is behind us.

I wonder if you notice the structural similarity between the reading from the Book of John, and that from the Book of Sirach?

The writers are treating the concept of *wisdom* and *the word* in very similar ways.

Both are more poetic than prose.

Short phrases.

Linked and tied together.

Whether John is directly based on this particular passage, or another specific one from the Book of Sirach is of course unknown, and more likely what is happening here is that Sirach, a book of Hebrew wisdom, likely emerging from Egypt in and around 180-175 BCE, is written under the conventions of wisdom literature of the day, or which happens to be the largest surviving example.

And the Book of John, probably written in the late first century CE makes use of the literary conventions of which Sirach is an example.

Personally, I find all of this fascinating.

Understanding the Biblical writings as products of cultures and history, of having been influenced by literary convention, political events of the day makes them, in my mind, no less spiritually significant.

No less fecund with transformative potential.

Both of these texts, point to a presence

In the cosmos and human history

Of a transcendence

That is accessible

That calls to the human heart

Beckoning to be recognized

Received

Integrated

There is a dynamic motion

Rather than static stratification

The holy

The divine

Less a destination

And more a companion on the journey

I wonder where you stand on the subject of New Years resolutions?

Do you make them?

Do you keep them?

Do you record them?

Are they for you a plumb line upon which you seek to build?

Do you generally remember what they even were mid-March?

In his book of blessings,

To Bless the Space Between Us,

John O'Donahue

Reflects on the idea of threshold

On liminality

To change is one of the great dreams of every heart – to change the limitations, the sameness, the banality, or the pain. So often we look back on patterns of behavior, the kind of decisions we make repeatedly and that have failed to serve us well, and we aim for a new and more successful path or way of living.

But change is difficult for us. So often we opt to continue the old pattern, rather than risking the danger of difference. We are also often surprised by change that seems to arrive out of nowhere.

A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up.

At this threshold a great complexity of emotions comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one of the reasons such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual. It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds; to take your time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward.

The time has come to cross.

I like the idea of newness calling across a threshold

Possibility speaking with invitation

Into the human heart

Revealing what is possible

Sketching potential

This is to me what our readings signify

An invitation to step across personal and communal threshold

Wherein we are able to name patterns that

To use O'Donahue's language

Have failed to serve us well

This is our first service of 2021

And I pray that these times of music, prayer, and reflection

Offer you space to listen to the gentle voice of wisdom

Insight with which to examine what threshold might be before you

Language with which to name the new frontier into which you feel beckoned

And the grace to recognize that change is not a pre-requisite for worthiness

For belovedness

As the incomparable

And indomitable

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Webber

Reminds her Social Media followers

(and herself)

Each year at this time...

*There is no resolution that if kept,
Will make you more worthy of love.*

*You, as your actual self
And not as some made up ideal,
Are already worthy.*