

SERMON: Pentecost 10 2007

The Rev. Eleanor Ellsworth, St. James by the Sea Episcopal Church, La Jolla, CA July 29th, 2007

Colossians 2:6-1: Ps. 85; Luke 11:1-13

I drink a lot of tea. Always have. My husband, Bob, graciously and mercifully brings hot tea to my bedside every morning. Usually black tea. At night I often make tea, such as last night's, *Evening's Peace*, with chamomile flowers, orange blossoms, citrus and rose-hip peels, lemon grass, nana-mint and hibiscus.

Tea, according to James Norwell Platt's book, *New Tea Lover's Treasury: the Classic True Story of Tea*, tells us that "tea was well known and widely available in China long before the time of Christ."

Before reading that I frankly never had considered whether or not Jesus was a tea drinker. My limited research about food and drink in the Palestine of his day leads me to believe that he would not have had access to tea. Wine? Yes. Tea? No, not probably.

Tea is a healthy pleasure of life, with about 380 varieties world-side.

Writing from Russian Hill in San Francisco, Platt piqued my interest theologically about tea with this assertion: "Just as wine is the Christian sacrament, tea is Taoist/Buddhist communion and its story illuminates all Asian life and culture, not to mention much else besides."ⁱⁱ

Taoist, Buddhist, or Christian, tea is a beverage which evokes a sense of calm, serenity and well-being. Whereas Jesus and his early followers and family may not have had access to tea leaves and tea rituals, I associate the preparing and enjoyment of tea with the contemplative tradition of Christianity as well as Eastern contemplative traditions.

Thomas Merton

I can easily imagine the Trappist, Thomas Merton, sipping tea as he wrote or kept silence. Tea is a staple of every retreat I have led or attended. It is an aesthetic aid in attaining a contemplative, prayerful mental posture. Jesus' famous "Lord's Prayer" has undoubtedly been prayed with tea as its accompaniment since our Anglican ancestors discovered the contemplative effects of tea.

Tea and Contemplation

A favorite photograph from my childhood is one of me about three years old sitting on my father's knee, sipping tea at a tea farm in Japan. Fast forward to middle-childhood when I watch my father and brother go to the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky where Thomas Merton made his home in that community. He was called to be a contemplative in a complex world, a contemplative who used his contemplative gifts to change the world through his writings.

I learned through osmosis from my father how important contemplation was. Prayer and silence, listening, learning how to "be" alone and wander in the woods, were normal parts of my young life. That was part of life: part of life which enabled one to be receptive to the world and to other people.

I never met Thomas Merton, but I considered him a spiritual friend since my father thought so much of him. Later I read many of his writings and was crushed to learn of his early and unexpected death in Thailand.

We know he was a man, a monk, a saint and sinner, just like us. His example teaches us that meditation, silence, and contemplation are essential elements of living well and purposefully in

God's world. Without contemplation, without prayerfulness, the soul withers and our ability to reach out to the world is diminished.

"Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life," wrote Merton. He goes on to say, "It is that life itself, fully awake, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being. It is the vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source."

"Awareness of the reality of that Source"

Being aware. Seeking the Source.

Some questions for you to ponder...to contemplate. How do you seek the Source? What do you do to search? Do you "knock on the door," to quote our Lucan lesson today, to know God, to know Christ, to know the Holy Spirit? I hope so and I suspect the answer is "yes."

Gospel promise

The Gospel promise is "seek" and you shall find. "Knock" and it shall be opened unto you. But this will not happen if we do not stop doing things all the time, anaesthetizing ourselves with business and busyness.

To sit, walk, or stand in utter awe of the Source of all being and all creation requires spiritual energy and focus.

Making contemplative practices part of everyday life enables us to discover the reign of God in our own lives. We sharpen our senses in contemplation and see and hear and feel the world differently than when we barely skim over its contours. Deep, abiding gratitude for all there is and for all we have is at the heart of contemplation, once unleashed. Love for the world and for one another takes on new meaning.

Being mindful...truly mindful of our own need to stop, to think reflectively, to pray for ourselves as well as for others, to meditate on the glories of the world provided through the mystery of God's creation, to wonder about God playfully and even provocatively, all help us be in touch with our spiritual nature. This nature is real, and ignoring it imperils the health of our souls and bodies. That is where having the proverbial "cup of tea" is a good beginning!

May I encourage all of us to take time this summer to create reflective time, and make it part of everyday life. Make sacred time happen, alone and with others. Let our hearts and head humbly and happily acknowledge our dependence upon God in this world and in the next.

Our reading from 2nd Corinthians puts it this way:

To live our lives in Christ, to be rooted to him and be build up in Christ begins with our soulful rest in Christ.

He asked us to follow him. Let's do that and follow him to the serene desert within ourselves where God is waiting to be found.

ⁱ Pratt, James Norwood. *New Tea Lover's Treasury: the Classic True Story of Tea*. (San Francisco: Tea Society, 1999), p.3.)

ⁱⁱ **IBID.** p. XIV.