DAY 3: The infant KING of the Jews—TIKKUN OLAM

Before coming to prayer this morning, listen to or watch morning news; read the headlines in the paper; go to a news website and let the stories, many as they are, each called “breaking news”, dig into your consciousness. Stay with the pictures or quotes that disturb you the most.

It is one thing to ponder mythical kings and their journeys, the symbolism of the gifts they offer, the interpretation of the story in the Christian tradition, but eventually we return to our lives. And the reality that surrounds us.

We always pray “in context”. The context might be a scripture passage, a life event, a memory, an unreconciled relationship. Each of these, maybe especially, the news of the day, connects the realities of faith and human experience.

Spend some time listing terms that you think best describe our world today.

MORNING

Prayer

At the edges of our borders you wait, and at our territorial lines you linger, because the place where we touch beyond our boundaries is where you take your delight.

And when we learn to read the landscape of our fears, and when we come to know the terrain of every sorrow, then will we turn our fences into bridges and our borders into paths of peace.

Jan Richardson. Night Visions
Ponder this

What are we to do with the suffering of migrants and their children? With people who live on the streets? With priests who sexually abuse children? With those who are hungry? With a political world in ethical chaos?

Returning to our Jewish roots, we learn of a term “tikkun olam.” In Judaism, the term is quite old and it has had different meanings in different times. Since World War II it has been used to mean: **mending the broken world.** You described that brokenness earlier today in the terms you listed to describe what you gleaned from the news today.

Do you want to add any other terms to describe the broken world of today? Spend quiet time with the brokenness.
AFTERNOON

The Magi search for the King of the Jews; throughout his ministry, Jesus teaches about the kingdom/reign of God more than any other theme.

Just as the Magi appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, so, too, is this detailed description of the kingdom found only in Matthew

Read carefully — Matthew 25: 31-46

Consider the following

Thus the reign of God . . . has a this-worldly, public dimension. To welcome and hope for God’s reign is not an abstraction; it means the expectation of a radical reordering under God’s rule of our world with all that this implies in the way of responsibility for one another, without the exclusion of anyone and with the inclusion of future generations . . . Reshaping the world according to God’s rule . . .

It would be simply inconsistent, knowing that we can act and that the reign of God is made accessible to us, to accept present injustice and oppression as the inevitable and enduring pattern of history, and to expect that in utter discontinuity with the relationships and structures built up in history there would suddenly be a day on which God would restore the divine rule, rewarding each for individual behavior without reference to the social responsibility that is the other side of social empowerment. Monika Hellwig, “Eschatology” in Systematic Theology Vol. II

Even in the 20th century kingdom of darkness and death, we find Tikkun Olam:

What is overwhelming in the tales recounted by (concentration camp) survivors is how small these necessary acts of sustenance seem. These deeds . . . include symbols of spiritual kinship that prove most important in keeping life alive. Terrence des Pres quotes a marvelous incident capturing this point — the giving of a birthday gift in the concentration camp:

Ilse, who worked on the day shift, came back by noon . . . She turned away from me so that I could not see what she was doing, and dug into her pocket. “I have brought you a present!” she announced triumphantly. There on a fresh leaf was one red, slightly mashed, raspberry.” Edward Feld, The Spirit of Renewal: Finding Faith after the Holocaust
Reflection

With each of our breakings You break, and with each
Of our woundings Your own wounds grow deeper.
Yet you hold the pieces together
until we learn to make the new connections,
and you guard each throbbing wound
till we have had enough of pain.
You remind us that it is our delight you seek,
not our suffering.
And you tell us It is not the wounds that give us life,
but the tending of them in each other.
And you say it is not the breaking that makes us whole
but the mending of the pieces that brings us life anew.

We see the signs
but cannot always divine their meanings.
You call us to move forward not always knowing
whether what we grasp in our hands
will prove to be a seed of hope or a thorn in our flesh.
Train our fingers, that what brings life we may with persistence hold,
and that which wastes our souls we may with grace release.

Jan Richardson. Night Visions

Conclusion

gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh
kings and King and kingdom
a broken world
tikkun olam
one red, slightly mashed, raspberry
gifts