

“Everlasting Father”  
Isaiah 25:6-9; John 14:1-7  
December 16, 2018

Warning: time for us to put on our thinking caps, at least for a little while this morning!

Heraclitus is not a name heard very often from the pulpit - or anywhere else, for that matter. But most of us will readily recognize some of his tidbits of wisdom. In fact, it was Greek philosophers like Heraclitus, who lived long before Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, that got the Christian church thinking that there was a place in Heaven for people like them, even if they had never heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Why? Because it was readily apparent that the God of Israel had obviously spoken not just to biblical prophets, but God had revealed Wisdom to pagans such as the Greeks.

But I digress. Heraclitus, among other things, talked about The Logos as the ordering principle, and therefore the Source, of the universe. Now, Logos means “The Word” - and so when the Church began to preach that Jesus was The Word of God, all of Hellenistic civilization -which was basically the known world north of the Sahara and west of Mesopotamia, all of Hellenistic civilization sat up and took notice.

But this morning Heraclitus interests us for another reason: he suggested that you can never step into the same river twice. Heraclitus pointed out that if you go down to the Sandy Brook today, the water in it will not be the same water as was there yesterday, or tomorrow. And the river bed will be different as well, since the rocks will have eroded, or even shifted, or some silt may have washed away. The Sandy Brook of 11:30 am on December 16 is not the same Sandy Brook as it was when the Deacon tolled the church bells just half an hour or so before.

Now, with all this talk about the Sandy Book this morning, I am NOT going to talk about the proposed revisions to the Clean Water Act of 1972, currently under consideration in D.C. What should interest us, though, is that Heraclitus put out the idea that the only constant in our created universe, is change. A few thousand years later,

Benjamin Franklin revised Heraclitus, noting that there are indeed two constants in our universe: Death, and Taxes. I can just see old Ben saying that with a twinkle in his eye and his tongue firmly in his cheek!

Now this might lead some of us to conclude that change is good, since Death and Taxes are not so good. But Christianity - which rests on two pillars: one from Hebrew scripture, and the other from Greek civilization - Christianity has stood by the proposition that there is something outside of our universe that is constant - and not only constant, but also permanent - and as such it is the Source of all goodness. Most religions will readily agree. Where Christianity parts company with other religions is in the belief that on that first Christmas night, what was constant and permanent came into our changing world to dwell among us, full of grace and truth.

But back to Heraclitus for a moment. Heraclitus, then, taught that in our world there's nothing permanent - except change itself. In this world we have seen so much change in our own lifetimes that it boggles the mind. For generations people lived the same lives, day in and day out, generation in and generation out. Inventions were few and far between for centuries on end, until the Industrial Revolution started us on a roller coaster ride that has brought us unimaginable changes over the last 200 years.

Still, this age of ours doesn't have a monopoly on instability and insecurity even though change seems to be accelerating ever the faster. The days of the prophet Isaiah were also filled with profound shocks and uncertainties. The Temple of the Son of David, King Solomon, was in ruins. It had stood for hundreds of years at the center of a proud nation that had considered itself God's chosen people. But in the time of Isaiah, that nation was no more. An entire people had been uprooted, torn from the Land that they had been promised, thanks to a barbaric enemy that had no respect, it seemed, for either God or humankind. An entire way of life had been snuffed out - the practices of centuries meant nothing now, while the beliefs, the rules of society, and the system of law were all called into question now that Israel was in exile.

People felt adrift, in despair. Their lives lacked foundation. They had no anchor, no solid rock. Whatever had given their lives meaning, whatever had been the center of their reason for living, had suddenly given way. Change was all about them. Change was seemingly the only permanence in their lives. They had no one to protect them, no safety net. No one who could give them counsel, wonderful or otherwise. There was no one they could rely on. No one in whom they could place their trust. No one who really cared. No one to turn to. A Promised Land that had sustained a nation, that had provided for the children who had tilled her soil, that had served as the ground for the roots of an entire people, was now a distant memory. The people had been transported hundreds of miles from that Promised Land, which had been left behind.

The feelings of the Israelites were probably not all that different from what we go through in our personal lives at the time of the death of a parent. Even if we ourselves are now parents or even grandparents, the loss of someone who has given us life, who has given us our start, who has made us who we are, who has made possible what we are - that loss can bring us to the edge of grief, and beyond. Even if our relationship with our mother or father has not been the best, even if we have not spoken in years, even if it seems that one has made matters so difficult for the other - the loss of a parent can be more than devastating. For in them was our anchor. Even if we have rejected them - their outlook, their attitudes, their ways of doing things - we cannot deny that they are so much at the center of what it has meant for us to be alive.

I was somewhat amused when my wife's father was named Father of the Year for 1980 in Patchogue, Long Island. Father of the Year sounds nice, it is something of an honor ... but being a father surely means more than a year - or an eight-hour day - or a five day work week. It is, or should be, a constant. It is, or should be, forever.

Oh, I know that some fathers walk away from their duties, that some turn their backs on their homes and reject those for whom they are responsible, abandoning those

most in need of care and concern. But whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, the responsibility is still there. A father is forever - or should be.

Surely most of us remember the story of the Prodigal Son. Does it not tell us that our heavenly Father does not cease being who He is and what He does just because His children might be ungracious or ungrateful? Surely some of us remember the prophecy of Isaiah, who tells the daughter of Jerusalem that she has been doubly punished for her sin. Does that not tell us that our heavenly Father does not indulge us simply because we are His children? Surely some of us remember Jesus trying to tell His disciples that if they want to know the Father, they need to know His Son. Does that not tell us that Christ himself was the spirit and image of the Father of us all?

The promises are there: our heavenly Father is steadfast, always ready for us, ever open to us. Our heavenly Father is constantly prepared to deal with us honestly. Our heavenly Father is present, without fail, to welcome us as His own, because we are the brothers and sisters of His only begotten.

Indeed, in the Everlasting Father we always have a home, a place where there is room for all, where all are invited, where there are many mansions ... because, like so many earthly parents, our heavenly Father would like nothing more than to have us come home.

And so in our Father's house there are many mansions. For you, and for me. All we have to do is to come and enter that Kingdom not made with hands. And getting there is simple. We don't need a roadmap, because we have a guide in Jesus. We don't need directions, because Jesus will walk with us. Forces of whirling change and upset may be found round about us, but our goal is ever fixed, unchanging, unchangeable.

And so our Everlasting Father calls us to come home, for He is waiting for us. He is always there for us. There is no reason to doubt Him, to lose faith in Him, to distrust Him. And whether we have already been well on our way, or even if we are just starting out fresh on our pilgrimage of faith ... When the world becomes dark, the skies cloudy,

and we feel we are in danger of losing our bearings - then all we need do is to Look Up.  
See the Star. And then find the Manger, where the Everlasting Father became a Child to  
redeem us all.

Let us pray: