

Our friend and poet from Greensboro, Linda Brown, who spent a weekend with us at Holy Spirit last year, wrote these words in recent days:

*An angel has visited us and handed us a gift.  
Now, there's a reason every story's heroine and hero have a  
moment of hesitation before they accept a gift.  
Even Mother Mary said, "How shall this be?" before she said,  
"yes" to her angel's gift.  
Gifts come in all shapes and sizes.  
Gifts also come with mysteries undiscovered and challenges  
undisclosed.  
They are lightened, and they are shadowed.  
And, they are always perfect.*

*But, there are rules.*

*Sometimes we must pass a test.  
Or, we must take a long trip into a hiding place to reach the gift.  
Or, we must say the right words to the mysterious stranger we  
meet on the road,  
and we must choose which road to take, always we must choose.  
Sometimes the rules are simple, sometimes not. There are things  
we must remember;  
there are things we must not ever forget.  
There is much we must learn.*

*Usually we are given something we will need, to understand the  
gift, to unearth the treasure.*

*In the old stories it is often a weapon of steel.  
But now?*

*We have a different treasure.  
We begin to know who we are.  
The ancient eternal talisman is within reach, is a light, is alive, is  
the "yes" that can be on our lips, is the choice we are challenged  
to make. The door is open, the way is through, into the unknown,  
into the beauty of perfect choice, into the body of hope.  
An angel has visited us and handed us a gift.  
We have a different treasure.  
We begin to know who we are.<sup>1</sup>*

Many who have devoted their lives to studying and understanding history, culture, science, climate, politics, economics, psychology, spirituality, religion (you name it) are telling us that we're in a historical moment of massive upheaval and crisis. Most of us — regardless to how much we are reading or tuning in to the chorus of voices in the news, media and literature — simply sense, in our gut, intuitively, that something BIG, really BIG, is happening. In this moment, we are being presented with an incredible opportunity - a gift!

The gift, I believe, is ***to know and to experience that we are free and beloved children of God - all of us!*** But, the visiting angel is telling us, showing us, revealing to us — that our racism, white privilege, and white supremacy is preventing us, as

people who are Caucasians, from fully knowing and experiencing our Beloved-ness and Freedom.

I'm going to use the words "white body supremacy" instead of only the words "white supremacy" because some who are leading in the work of dismantling racism are saying this terminology matters, because white supremacy is located in our bodies, and this terminology can help us to better locate there and not just in our heads. White bodies and black and brown bodies are not regarded equally in our nation — and white body supremacy has been perpetuated because of our skin color in our white, black, and brown bodies. White supremacy is located in our bodies as well as all our systems, culture and institutions.

There is a little story about three fish swimming in the ocean. One fish swims past the other two fish that are swimming together and the fish says as she passes, "*the water feels great today!*" One of the other fish turns to his buddy and says, "What's water?" "What's she talking about?"

Water in the story is white body supremacy and racism. We are swimming in it! Part of the angelic gift that is being presented to us right now is that finally, the scales on many of our eyes are falling off -- and we are finally, finally *beginning* to wake up (to become what our black siblings describe as: "woke") to the reality

that we are swimming in racism and white body supremacy. We are beginning — oh, just barely beginning to get “woke” - to see and realize how white body supremacy and racism has for centuries inflicted — and is still inflicting — tremendous violence and immeasurable suffering and harm to our Black and Brown sisters and brothers.

But, we are also seeing that white body supremacy and racism is causing great harm to us, too. As people who are Caucasian, we too are experiencing immense harm and violence because white body supremacy and racism is preventing us from knowing and experiencing our beloved-ness and freedom as God's children.

In the sermon last week Ann Smith beautifully shared some of her own struggle, agony, and joy in beginning to wake up to the insidiousness, perversity, and violence of white body supremacy and of her desire and efforts to enter into the struggle for healing. The great *Frederick Douglass* said, *“without struggle, there is no progress. Let's struggle together for our collective soul.”* I believe that many of us are ready to wake up and join the struggle for our collective soul — for we know that unless we enter the struggle for healing we may not receive the gift the angel is offering us.

But how do we do enter this struggle? What can we do? Where do we turn? How do we engage our energy, our minds our bodies in the struggle? Racism and white body supremacy is all so huge, daunting, and overwhelming that we can easily fall into despair and paralysis, or simply slip back into our trance. That's part of our white privilege, we can slip back into a trace ...

My friends, as your priest, I am going to point you to the answer to these enormous questions by reminding you of what you already know: God alone is our Strength and our Hope. God is our Light and our Salvation. And today, like every day, God gives us what we need, our daily bread. God provides what we need to engage in this struggle for healing. And today our gospel lesson is only a few sentences. The words from Matthew's gospel are Jesus' words to his disciples as they venture out on their mission. They are inspired words for we disciples today — and they're just enough for us to get our arms around and get started:

*Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; ... and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple — truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.*

*"Welcome the prophet. Give a cup of cold water to the little ones."* As disciples who have troubled, overwhelmed, and despairing hearts, these instructions are clear and manageable, and they are just enough for us to get our arms around and get started on this momentous work. We can do this!

To welcome the prophet, we first need to have some clarity about who the prophets are.

*They are not fortunetellers. They are truth tellers. They tell God's truth, God's revelation. They shatter the silence that surrounds injustice. In the words of Abraham Joshua Herschel, prophets are "the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor...the prophet's ear... is attuned to the cry imperceptible to others... They serve as 'witnesses' who must 'bear testimony' in such a way that they 'reveal' or uncover God. Their message begins with denouncing our systems of power, greed, arrogance, violence and hate, and it follows with announcing hope and life for the victims of our sin, evil and injustice. Their message demands our response.<sup>2</sup>*

In a nutshell, prophets will make us uncomfortable — they will cause us to be embarrassed, ashamed, afraid, and defensive. But if we are going to enter the struggle for healing, we must

welcome the prophets. *We, my fellow white people, are going to have to learn to welcome the uncomfortable.* Dismantling white body supremacy and racism will upset and upend us, and it will probably make us squirm, deny, shut-down, moan, cry, revolt. It will likely cause us to be angry and depressed. It will be messy, strenuous, and difficult work. It will be costly — for welcoming the prophets will require our time, and energy. It will also be costly to our egos, our bank accounts, our politics, our sense of security, our power. Friends, we are going to have to lose our lives to gain our lives.

We can do this, though; we can welcome the prophets, because God is our strength, our light, our salvation, our hope — and the gift of knowing and experiencing our belovedness and freedom as God's children will be ours if we do.

One prophet I welcomed this week, Resmaa Menakem, advises various practices for white people who are intent on healing from the trauma of racism. These practices are like — like exercise that we will need to practice like we are training for a marathon or learning a new musical instrument. One practice he advises is for white people to move our bodies into spaces with black people — where we are in the minority. He said that if we do this, and then stop and pause, and pay attention to our bodies,

then, in doing so, he said will inevitably experience rage. The source of this rage, in part, he says, will be what he calls "ghost trauma" because ancestral racism and white body supremacy inhabits the very cells of our bodies unconsciously. To welcome the prophets will be costly but, in doing so, we will receive the gift of the angel.

The second instruction offered to we disciples in the gospel today is to give a cup of cold water the little ones. Such a simple act; we can all do this. Give a cup of cold water - simple gestures of kindness and hospitality to those people with whom we come into contact in the course of our daily lives. While engaging in the enormous and confounding work of dismantling racism and white body supremacy, we can all offer cups of cold water to those we encounter.

A friend of mine who lived for while in Palestine told me a story this week about his experience living there and being on the receiving end of the radical hospitality of Middle Eastern culture. This was in the 1980's when American foreign policy was militantly pro-Israel and so, very oppressive to the Palestinians. Thus, in many ways, he, as an American, embodied the enemy to Palestinians. He said it was about a twenty-minute walk from his apartment to his office, but he quickly learned that he needed to



allow at least two hours for the walk to work, because along the way, Palestinians would invite him to share a cup of Turkish coffee, and the practice involved sitting down with people for unrushed conversations. This is the culture in which our gospel lesson today was written. So, this is a good thing to remember as we practice offering cups of cold water — to take time to *really listen* and know those with whom we share these simple acts of hospitality.

My friends, in this time of great upheaval and crisis, an angel is visiting us and handing us a gift. May we, through God's grace and mercy, have the courage and strength to welcome the prophets, to share cups of cold water and, in doing so, to receive the gift. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Beatrice Brown, "Poems for Peace" found on the web, 6-23-20, "*The Perfect Gift, A Conversation with My Friends.*"

<sup>2</sup> Megan McKenna, *Prophets Words of Fire*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), pp. 3-21