

The Fourth Sunday of Pentecost, Year C

July 6, 2025

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, OH

"Homeostasis of the Soul"

The Rev. Patricia Rose

One Sunday morning a few weeks ago, I was bustling off to get here to preside at the 7:45 service. As I was rolling down a street in my neighborhood, I reached down to adjust my seat belt and apparently touched a very large brown and tan moth that must have been sleeping in my car. It flew up and fluttered around and into my face. I'm not sure who was more startled! But then it flew to the corner where the windshield meets the door, folded up its big wings and snuggled as much of itself as it could, into the recess of the corner.

It was startling but actually very beautiful, and as I watched it burrow in, what occurred to me was that it was seeking homeostasis, and I felt comfort and joy in that.

OK, I know that the joy of homeostasis might not be the obvious or most common thing that people would think at that moment but that's where I went, and in fact it inspired some reflection that relates to today's gospel I'd like to share.

I will tell you that I remember how much I loved learning about homeostasis in 5th or 6th grade. I loved the sound of the word, and I loved the concept of homeostasis which I had never thought about before and yet somehow it also felt like something that was oddly very familiar.

So, the concept of homeostasis is this: it's actually an involuntary physiological process in all living organisms including plants, which establishes a certain internal stability, even when there are external changes.

It regulates things like temperature, the balance of fluids, potassium, or whatever. All kinds of things. The body, the wisdom of the body, knows how to do this to create the best conditions, this narrow range of conditions, for our cells to function optimally, for the purpose of our overall survival - staying alive - greatest health. Isn't that great?

You may be asking yourself, how this relates to the gospel story about spreading the good news. Well, thank you for asking.

For me, it harkens back to a beautiful phrase I heard in a sermon over 20 years ago given by Fr. Ken Overberg, a Jesuit priest who was the chair of the Theology Department at Xavier University in Cincinnati. The phrase was "the self-expression of God in all creation."

It had a profound effect on me and has influenced my perceptions ever since. In one sense we have no idea who or what God is, this God we pray to and long to be close to. Or maybe we have some idea but in the comparison of the speck we know to the immense reality of God, it's nothing.

But what if all of creation is a gift attempting to tell us about who God is. What a stunning way to perceive and receive all that we see.

What if all the billions of manifestations of life tell us something? From the vast space of a cosmos that we can't imagine being infinite nor can we imagine what sort of nothing could be beyond it? To all the beautiful marvels of nature on earth, to every precious baby that is born, many of whom are here with us today, every one of us a distinct and precious expression of God.

So perhaps what homeostasis tells us that God is a magnificent Love that is joyously inviting us to participate in a process of *restoring ourselves to optimal balance*. *Optimal balance* for knowing Truth, for resting in Truth, for a visceral sense of knowing God and for knowing not only the fullness of life in a body, but the timelessness of life in Spirit.

Perhaps this outer process of homeostasis is a process that is active in our soul and our heart as well on a more subtle and powerful level. And maybe that's why it feels so oddly familiar. Perhaps this outer homeostasis is a gift to help us understand a deeper homeostasis.

This deeper process is not just involuntary however through the wisdom of the body, but voluntary, from the gift of our freedom to choose it and consciously engage in it and from using the incredible gifts of wisdom of heart, mind, faith and soul that we have been given. Offering us the opportunity to learn to notice when we are out of balance and to adjust ourselves to the optimal balance for our own aliveness, peace, and freedom.

To learn to return again and again to rest in God, to transform our consciousness so that we begin to live from that place of balance and know who we are more fully.

This process would be, as outer physiological homeostasis itself is, not static, but living, a dynamic ongoing process of establishing a vibrant equilibrium.

This very engagement then, with the homeostasis of our entire being, brings us into the living and dynamic faith which we need to discern how to live our lives as disciples and as faith communities.

This brings us to today's gospel. Jesus was giving the charge to 70 to go out and spread the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near. The kingdom of heaven can also be called the reign of Divine Love.

We know that Jesus was speaking to a very different world and context than what we live in now, with different needs and aims. And as well the gospel writers both Luke and Matthew who told this same gospel story in slightly different ways, both filtered the universal core of meaning that Jesus of Nazareth taught and filtered to be meaningful to their context.

What parts of the specific instructions that Jesus gives are specific to that world, and what parts are timeless? In other words, how do we spread the good news today, staying true to the core truths love, compassion for all, respect for the dignity of all, justice, mercy, and forgiveness but responding to the world as it is now?

The wisdom needed to know that comes from this place of our ongoing dynamic engagement to optimal balance and presence with God. The process of homecoming again and again, the restoration of homeostasis.

We live in a world of 8 billion people as opposed to the world of about 200 million in the time of Jesus. We live in a religiously pluralistic context, a world in great need of interreligious dialogue, where we know our spreading of the good news cannot take place from a stance of exploitation and superiority.

Our spreading of the good news is needed from a place of deep respect and love for the dignity of all. We live in a world where religious leaders of all faiths are called to model the possibility of harmony and unity that is possible even when we think differently. We need to model the collaboration that is beyond fearful insistence that we all be alike. The collaboration that is loving while also unwilling to participate in systems that oppress others or cause suffering, incite fear, and promote hate.

By grounding ourselves actively in the homeostasis of God's radical love, we transform ourselves.

We live in a world where we are called to evolve as a species. Evolution has been going on since the dawn of life on our planet. We are called now as humans to evolve spiritually, or face extinction. We are called to be less concerned with goals of growth of our church and more concerned with love and justice, healing and peace, connection and respect for all.

What hasn't changed is that the task is difficult, and what hasn't changed is that the love of God, and the peace of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit is with us and that's what we need to tap into in order to know how to spread the good news of radical love with radical love. By staying in balance with God, the deeper effects of what we do exceeds what is apparent. Our concern is staying in homeostasis with God, not with our short term achievements.

As Christ told the 70, do not rejoice in the power of what you do, but that your names are written in heaven.

That is, what matters most is the changes that occurs by our actively and devotedly choosing to return over and over again to the balance of resting in God. That radically transforms us and contributes to the transformation of humanity, one by one, it's what we can do, and it's how we can best spread the good news.

I really did feel blessed by that moth in my car.

And I did free it when I arrived at St. Paul's so it may still be flying around here somewhere. It brings me to pray that, like moths that are startled awake and flutter around in temporary confusion, let us learn to come to a place of rest and balance with God, to a fuller aliveness and joy. And through that, may we find ourselves waking up being freed into a holy and beautiful place that we could not have imagined arriving to on our own.