

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Second Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – May 22, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

For Reflection

**But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

— Jeremiah 29:7 (NRSV)

G-d's Accomplice

I once asked my Hebrew Testament professor if G-d – in order to be complete in nature – must have both a light and a dark side, both good and evil intentions. We stood in the courtyard of Claremont School of Theology for two hours as he explained exactly how G-d was all good and that we humans of mixed nature must refrain from projecting our evil tendencies onto our Creator.

Dr. Rolf Knierim had his reasons for his theology – and a lifetime of study to back it up. At the age of 17 he had been conscripted into the Nazi Youth and shot at Allied planes. Two years later the war had ended and ten of his best friends had committed suicide. Their identities had been so intertwined with Nazism that without it – and in facing the reality of what it was about – they were driven to self-annihilation. Rolf became a scholar and vowed that such movements would never happen again. He was fierce – and convinced me that G-d – as in the force that created all that IS – contains no evil. But human beings – although created by this Good G-d – are another matter. And this is explained by Free Will – freedom to choose – and the existence of possibilities to choose from.

I won't give you the whole 2 hours. But I do feel the need to explain the use of the word "Accomplice" to describe our relationship with this Great Goodness – Who – although never evil may at times seem to be neutral on matters of great importance to us.

At first glance you might think that I'm indicating that, in reference to this text from Proverbs, the Holy Spirit – or Wisdom – and thus all of us who have Breath – are, with G-d, "partners in crime" – "ones who participate in the commission of a crime without being the principal actors" – "persons who join with another in carrying out some plan (especially an unethical or illegal plan)."

But this word “accomplice” comes from the word “*complice*...from Old French, from Late Latin meaning complex **partner, associate**, from Latin *complicāre to fold together*; see *complicate*.” Synonyms include: “henchman, coadjutor, abettor, accessory” – but also include “ally, associate, assistant, companion, comrade, helper, colleague, collaborator, confederate.”

We Progressive Christians have often used the term “Co-Creators” with G-d – which feels a bit presumptive to me – but okay. I prefer a term like “Accomplice” because it gives G-d the role of principal actor – with our help. We are G-ds companions, colleagues, collaborators, allies – as long as our choices align with the overall Plan. And the Holy Spirit or Wisdom – G-d’s Breath – Ruah – relentlessly calls out the Plan and reminds us where the boundaries and trajectories lie – since she helped to put them there. And “She” is never neutral – she tends to “delight” in us and the world we inhabit – squarely on the side of the Common Good – but with a twinkle in her eye that belies some mischief. Apparently, being G-d’s Accomplice doesn’t mean we have to be serious all the time – we can be amused, play with our Maker, even laugh at ourselves and the Universe – as long as we make good choices in the long run.

And that is what elections are about: making good choices about issues and people and plans that will serve the common good – and prove that we care about the welfare of the city and the country – the welfare of our fellow citizens – the welfare of the “least of these” who have less power or voice than others. The power of One Person, One Vote must not be taken for granted. People have fought and died for this – been jailed and persecuted for this – been redistricted and legislated out of this – even this year.

It is not only our privilege and our right to vote – it is our responsibility and our honor to cast our ballots – in June and in November and in all the elections to come. We may not like any or all of the people on that ballot – but each vote is needed to keep evil at bay, to keep progressing in G-d’s plan for the Beloved Community, a Global Village of compassion and protection and inclusion and health.

If we are not G-d’s Accomplices in repairing the world, then we are accomplices of those who would tear it apart. Rolf Knierim taught me that – history has taught us that – G-d has pointed this out repeatedly.

So as we do our part as G-d’s Accomplices – let’s remember that we do this for the Common Good – for the Beloved Community – and it MATTERS. Jim and Chris will be leading a discussion after worship – hopefully clarifying the issues that are up for decision in a few weeks. And at this time, we offer a blessing of all the hands in this room and beyond that will be casting ballots in the days and years ahead.

Please pray with me:

Call to Vote

By Jim Burklo

*Spirit of Love,
We gather today to commit ourselves to your ongoing work.
In a time of division and hate,
help us be seeds for justice and reconciliation.
When others say there is nothing we can do,
remind us of our responsibility as co-creators of your realm.
While many feel powerless,
inspire us to vote with our ballots
in ways that strengthen your vision for our world.
Embolden our witness,
through our voting and solidarity with the oppressed.
Help us embody the way of compassion and justice,
so that our values and actions may be one.
In your many names we pray,
Amen.*

Blessing of the Hands that Cast the Ballots

"May God, who is Love, guide your hand to vote for the common good!"

Scripture Reading for Sunday May 22, 2016 – Pentecost – Year C

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

1 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? 2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; 3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

4 "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. 22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth--26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. 27 When he established the

heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

Noun 1. accomplice - a person who joins with another in carrying out some plan (especially an unethical or illegal plan)

Confederate, assistant, helper, help, supporter - a person who contributes to the fulfillment of a need or furtherance of an effort or purpose; "my invaluable assistant"; "they hired additional help to finish the work"

Decoy, steerer - a beguiler who leads someone into danger (usually as part of a plot)

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ThesaurusAntonymsRelated WordsSynonymsLegend:

Accomplice - noun. partner in crime, ally, associate, assistant, companion, accessory, comrade, helper, colleague, collaborator, confederate, henchman, coadjutor, abettor

His accomplice was arrested after a high-speed car chase.

Collins Thesaurus of the English Language – Complete and Unabridged 2nd Edition. 2002 © HarperCollins Publishers
1995, 2002

ac·com·plice (ə-kŏm'plīs) - n. One who participates in the commission of a crime without being the principal actor. [Alteration of complice.]

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com·plice (kŏm'plīs) n. Archaic - An associate or accomplice, especially in crime.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Late Latin complex, complic-, one closely connected with : Latin com-, com- + Latin plicāre, to fold; see plek- in Indo-European roots.]

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complice ('kŏmplɪs; 'kɪm-) - n. obsolete an associate or accomplice

[C15: from Old French, from Late Latin complex partner, associate, from Latin complicāre to fold together; see complicate]

Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014 © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014

Musings by Jim Burklo

5-12-16

Blessing the Hands that Cast the Ballots

If ever there was a season for progressive-hearted people to urge their friends and neighbors to vote, this would be it.

Ritual is one powerful way to help each other make and keep the commitment to vote.

Ask your friend: *"With which hand will you vote in the upcoming election?"* With both of your hands, clasp that hand, close your eyes, and say: *"May the love of God guide your hand to vote for the common good. Amen!"* If you just happen to have a little bottle of [Josie Maran pure organic argan oil](#) or some other light oil in your handbag, rub a drop on the back of your friend's hand as you give the blessing. (Full disclosure: Josie is my stepdaughter.) Alternative wording for the non-theistic: *"May love guide your hand to vote for the common good."*

This simple ceremony gets the recipient of the blessing to make not just a verbal commitment, but a physical one. There is strong evidence from social psychology of the efficacy of this kind of practice. The ritual also makes voting a matter of the heart. In the midst of an electoral season of breathtakingly crude behavior and rhetoric, this simple ritual - which can be performed anywhere - redefines voting as an act of love for one's neighbors, near and far. It casts voting as an act of faith, an expression of the soul and the spirit. And by the way, rubbing oil on the back of the hand feels really good!

It is my hope that this little ritual will spread far and wide, happening in private and public settings, including churches and temples, everywhere. I hope that people will do it spontaneously with their friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. It will have its public debut in - where else? - Hollywood, on May 22 in 10:30 worship at [Mt Hollywood Congregational UCC Church](#). That same day, 3-5 pm, it will be performed in a free public event called [VOTING AS AN ACT OF FAITH](#), hosted by [Progressive Christians Uniting](#), at First United Methodist Church in Pasadena. The flyer for the event, and the template for the ritual as it can be performed in houses of worship, is attached. It's also in our new PCU book which I edited, [DEEPER LOVE](#). Stay tuned here for an upcoming video of the ceremony.

A "blessing of the ballot" ceremony for individuals, at the polls or after filling out an absentee ballot at home:

Repeat this prayer, silently or aloud, after voting: **"I thank God for all Americans who risked their lives defending my sacred right and duty to vote."** Then imagine saluting the ballot box, or saluting your ballot when you put it in the mail. As you salute, imagine the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the signing of the Constitution. Imagine the joy of southern slaves upon learning of their emancipation. Imagine the joy of women when they won their long fight for the vote. Imagine civil rights activists registering voters under threat from the KKK. Imagine Martin Luther King, Jr. saying "I have a dream!" at the march on Washington.