The Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

Do you have a favourite concerto? Maybe you do but don't even know it – that passage of a Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto (or maybe it was Grieg or Rachmaninov) you heard while watching figuring skating once, Beethoven's famous *Emperor*, Barber's Violin Concerto (the soundtrack to Terence Davies's *The Deep Blue Sea*), Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* or Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* anyone?

The concerto is an interesting musical form because it allows for virtuosic fireworks, pitting the individual (or occasionally a duo or trio) against the group (the other, the world). It isn't all about struggle, the form also allows for moments of peace building and togetherness. The word concerto itself suggests this – a conjunction of two latin words, *conserere* (to join or weave together) and *certamen* (a competition or fight). Concertos can be exciting because of this constant tension between opposites learning to find a balance between cooperation and independence – much like a marriage.

Some of you may know the new Wynton Marsalis Violin Concerto written for Nicola Benedetti (the recording just won a Grammy). The first beautiful, sweeping notes from the solo violin have been described as the Emergent Spiritual. The concerto tells a story – and particularly an American story – with its jazz improvisation and marching bands. There is a piercing whistle that occurs in the first movement – is it the whistle of a police officer or a protestor? Stop or I'll shoot? Or There's a Change Gonna Come - We shall Overcome.

Black Lives Matter.

So where does this new Violin Concerto fit into the tradition? How does it continue a story in the concerto form? How does it break new ground and push boundaries? In thinking about tradition, it is poignant to remember Ellis Marsalis, Jr., father to Wynton and five other mostly famous musical sons, who died of COVID-19 on April 1 – the lives he touched, the tradition he fostered and furthered – a mentor and teacher beyond measure.

Tradition is about linking the past and the future in the present. It is an essential part of the ministry of the Church and our understanding of how the Risen Christ is seen in the world, at work in us today furthering the Kingdom of God. Tradition is a fostering of the work over time and suggests the possibility of greater understanding, improvement and progress. We all know one lifetime is not enough to achieve much, and whatever we contribute will be part of a tradition in our professional practice, the branches of a family tree, the life of a community or nation.

In many art forms and practices, tradition is what is passed from master to student across the generations. Our knowledge and practice is cumulative and we hope to make slow and steady progress across time. Of course there are setbacks, some small and some large. War interrupts and destroys tradition – but out of pieces and fragments come new possibilities.

And so we come to Jesus talking to his disciples as He prepares to Ascend to Heaven – teaching them (and us) about the world, about the individual, about authority, about struggle – about love….

Like the Emergent Spiritual in the first sweeping notes of the Marsalis Violin Concerto, Jesus invites us into a story of the individual walking The Way – learning to love as He first loves us. We are being mentored in a New Tradition. We are being told of the need for faithful struggle. We are being invited into a marriage.

The authority of the Church is rooted in its marriage to Christ -(marriage like tradition being a union which furthers an endeavour or causes the birth of something new ordained by God – so not just, if most commonly, children – but also the next generation of ideas) – His spiritual flesh and blood in the Eucharist meeting our earthy selves (made ready in the waters of Baptism) becoming One Flesh – His Body in the World, animated by the Holy Spirit.

There is an understanding in Jesus's teachings and ministry, the world and the Kingdom are in conflict. His followers are called to be in the world but not of it – and living in the Kingdom of God which is now but not yet. THE WORLD CANNOT RECEIVE HIM BECAUSE IT NEITHER SEES HIM NOR KNOWS HIM. The struggle is to see and know – look with the heart for the eyes may be deceived.

Jesus is clear: love is rooted in the capacity to be in relationship with the needs of the other – a soloist entangled with the needs of the orchestra – to love Jesus is to be in the service of those in need; a willingness to take on the needs of the other - but the relationships here are more complex: it is not simply a matter of loving neighbour and learning to love self and God in our own frail ways but the need to become the Body of Christ and to love as Christ loves – the complexity is deepened as we learn Jesus represents us to the Father within the heart of the Trinity and from this heart the Father sends the Advocate for ever, this is the Spirit of Truth. As we grow in faith and service, this Spirit of Truth abides in us and we take on the transforming heart of Christ – our life and living are interdependent and mutual with the Eternal – we become Eucharistic (a thank-offering) – a true marriage.

Jesus talks about a specific time when the progression of Salvation (His saving Grace) will bring the Kingdom to fullness – ON THAT DAY – Jesus in the Father, You in Me, I in You – to have and to hold, from this day forth and for ever more.

We spend our days wondering and worrying about keeping things – the house, the garden, provisions in the fridge, our looks. In the end we do not keep anything. We are kept – in the palm of His hand – and at the centre of a tradition of struggle within the grace-filled life of the Church – until Sacraments cease - until His Kingdom Come – in earth as it is in heaven.

Listen to the music.

May the Peace of the Risen Christ be always with you.