

ALLELUIA

The elders had no wisdom that was wise enough. In the end, the best they could do was to counsel vigilance and wariness of anything that was not from the sea. In many ways, this was counsel against the age-old conviction that dolphins meet the world with openness and generosity in celebration of the gifts of the Great Spirit of Life and Good. It was counsel against all they had been led to believe by their devotion to the Great Spirit, counsel to act as it was not in their nature to do.

The terror from beyond the seas was nothing like the danger of shark or Orca, or any of the ravening predators that swam the oceans. These creatures were satisfying their hunger as even dolphins preyed on others in order to eat and survive. This was nature, cruel in many ways, though such cruelties were nothing compared to the misery that descended upon them from the land, this assault from creatures whose reach was seemingly endless and whose appetite was insatiable. There was a perversity in the lust and violence of these land creatures that defied comprehension. The webs that they dragged through the water wantonly snatched up everything in their path. Water and air were fouled wherever the land creatures were present. Were they immune to the sickness that flowed from their devices and settled everywhere in their wake? Were they so alien as not to be affected? Had they no concern for those who were poisoned? What sort of creatures were they? Creatures so strange that the elders were at a loss to know what could be done except to flee from them.

But there was no refuge far-flung enough to be safe. Out of the confusion and desperation of the dolphins a cry went up from some for a savior to come and deliver them. This appeal was unprecedented and spontaneous. Never had anyone made such a prayer before. From time immemorial prayers had been nothing but thanksgivings. So much goodness, sea and sky and the great profusion of life that swarmed the seas, surrounding them and sustaining them, and their community with one another—it was impossible not to be grateful. If there was tragedy, and tragedies were by no means unknown, it was in proportion to the great goodness of life lived in pod and school and herd. There was, they recognized, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to seek and a time to lose. But all of this was thrown into disarray with the ever greater presence of the upright land creatures, who had spread farther and farther across the waters, disturbing the world so that the dolphins did not any longer even know how to pray. What, after all, was a savior? And what could a savior do for them? No one could say, and that such a prayer could be prayed was one of the clearest signs of their perplexity and hopelessness.

It was impossible, of course, for the dolphins to fathom life on land or to imagine to what end it was lived by those who dwelt there. And the mystery of the land creatures was deepened by the fact that there would occasionally be strange and unpredictable exceptions to their general ruthlessness, instances in which they showed themselves to be gentle and caring, as when a young one swam away from its pod and became lost in a bay or in the mouth of a river, and the land creatures came to the rescue of the young one and tenderly coaxed it back to the sea. Such expressions of kindness were at once welcome and disconcerting, inasmuch as one could never be sure that these were not part of some

clever ruse by the land creatures to lull them into complacency before mounting another attack.

What to do? “Be vigilant,” the elders instructed. “Pray and wait,” said others “The Great Spirit of Life and Good will send a savior to...”

To what?

No one could say.

In any case, a savior did not come. This was a source of consternation to some, and questions were raised. Did not the Great Spirit of Life and Good know their need? What had they done to deserve the suffering they were enduring? In the face of the continuing onslaught, there were many who fell into a state of despair and ceased to pray altogether or even to believe.

Nai’a from the Atlantic Sea, was too young to be counted among the elders, but her wisdom was celebrated by many across the waters. She, too, pondered the question of whether they had been forsaken by the Great Spirit of Life and Good. She loved the Great Spirit and could not doubt the Great Spirit’s love for her and her kin. Could it be, she wondered, that the prayers for deliverance and especially the prayers prayed for a savior to lead them from their travails had been misguided and had deceived them in their thinking about the Great Spirit of Life and Good? And in a burst of inspiration, she realized that if it was a savior that was needed, it was the land creatures who must be saved. Though it was the dolphins that were being oppressed, it was the land creatures who must be saved.

“From what must they be saved,” she was asked when she spoke of her vision to others? “Were not the land creatures powerful in every way, dominant in all things? What did they lack?”

“They lacked grace and truth,” Nai’a said, “and lacking these things, they were a curse to themselves and from this they must be saved. They refused to see the Life and Good bestowed on all creatures by the Great Spirit. If they could be saved from this terrible ignorance,” Nai’a said, “all would be saved. If they could be brought to grace and truth, the balance of Life and Good which was the will of the Great Spirit could be restored. If there was to be a savior, the savior must appear on land, must come among the land creatures, perhaps even in the form of one of the land creatures. How this would be she could not say, but it was for this,” Nai’a said, “that they must hope and pray.”

Time passed, and in many places it appeared that the webs of the land creatures had become less deadly. Many wondered if the prayers for deliverance were being answered? Could it be that the land creatures were having a change of heart? It was impossible to say, and if they were, it was impossible to know if this was in answer to prayer. What could be said was that there were signs of hope. And yet, sickness and death continued to flow from the land into the sea. If there were blessings, they were mixed, and it was difficult to know what to believe. There were those who did not think that Naia’s vision had been realized and who viewed the land creatures as the irredeemable enemies of the Great Spirit of Life and Good. Others had faith that Nai’a’s vision was being worked out on the land in ways that they could not know and which they perceived but dimly as if peering through murky waters. Those who shared this faith prayed and sang praises. They taught their young to be more hopeful than afraid,

assuring them that the future belonged to the Great Spirit of Life and Good and that there would at last be peace and the sea would be a holy depth. In this hope, many experienced a joy that seemed to come to them from beyond, a joy that would at times come forth in a song outsoaring the common sense of language: aloo-alyaa, they would sing to the heavenly depths.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the days had grown short and the waters were greatly cooled. On the shore, land creatures set out lights against the long nights and in the glow of these lights, many gathered to contemplate the story of a birth long ago. At these gatherings, reverence was expressed for the newborn in whose humble vulnerability they believed the Eternal God from whom all blessings flow was present. Even though their world was a fraught and dangerous place, those who made these devotions nevertheless found in the remembrance of this infant a source of hope that life would not always be so and that there would one day be peace, which they spoke of as God's holy mountain, where there was no longer prey or predator. Many were moved in the course of these gatherings to sing hymns to the living and good God, songs of joy that welled up in the hearts of those who sang them. In the harmonies of their music, many heard the promise of communion beyond the bounds of language or voices, beyond even the divide of land and sea, something of eternity ringing out in a word beyond words, "Alleluia!"
Amen.

Christmas Day, 2010

Emanuel Lutheran Church