

Old & In the Way

I titled today's sermon 'Old & In the Way,' after the name of a terrific American roots album by Jerry Garcia & friends which I highly recommend to you. It was recorded in 1973, and predated the American roots and bluegrass revival by a couple of decades. Even if I can't get you to listen to bluegrass, however, I hope you will pay attention to the title. 'Old & In the Way,' has a double meaning which is relevant to our ancient church and our calling to recover our oldest traditions, and by God's grace, bring them to renewed life.

So first, here is the quick backstory of the album 'Old & In the Way.' This title has two meanings, the plain one is self-deprecatory. Garcia knew that a lot of people would dismiss this album, so he dismissed it first. At the time, bluegrass music was not in fashion. To the contrary, music was being electrified, synthesized and amplified to stadiums full of people. Garcia himself played to stadiums full of people. On this album, however, he turned his back on all that and sought out forgotten American folk roots in Appalachian music. The album title acknowledged that many fans would dismiss this music like a senile grandpa; its 'Old In the Way,' with an outdated and irrelevant world view. Here is where our church comes in. I think many of our people dismiss and label the Armenian Church in the same way. We do our service in an ancient language with no modern instruments or visual effects. We follow a man and writings about him, from two thousand years ago. Like Garcia's old time music, many people don't give our old time church a chance; It's just 'Old & In the Way.' We're younger and smarter than that, and we've got better places to go!

But then comes the second meaning of 'Old & In the Way.' You may think at first that this old music, this ancient church is irrelevant, just 'in the way.' But listen a few more times, come to worship and fellowship with us for a while and you will find that this old music, this old church is 'in the Way' with a capital W, meaning 'in the spirit, in the zone, in the flow of creation.' It taps into the deepest, oldest sources of music, the deepest, oldest sources of meaning making in our lives. You see all dedicated artists, all dedicated faithful are well aware that there is nothing new in art and life, the sources of art and life are old. We don't invent them, but discover them, rediscover them again and again by tapping into the oldest sources of life and making them our own. 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again,' we read in Ecclesiastes, 'there is nothing new under the sun.' Ec 1:9. All that is true and good is much older and greater than us. There is no new way that is all that interesting, just *the way* that we can tap into and rediscover for ourselves.

Not coincidentally, in our post Easter readings from Acts of the Apostles, the first followers of Jesus were called people of the way. That's the oldest name of our church, much older than 'Armenian,' 'Apostolic' and 'Orthodox,' even a bit older than 'Christian.' What are people 'of the way' and 'in the way' like? Well then and now, they know that the sources of good, beauty, and truth were given in the past, and that our mission in life is to make them known in the present, by a life surrendered to the good, the true and the beautiful. Jesus, like no one before him or since, could be described as this kind of 'Old & In the Way;' in the spirit, in the zone, in the flow of creation. He was no innovator. His words were mainly the old words of the prophets and seers. His ways were not his own, they were the ways of his Father, older than time itself.

Yet Jesus was an absolute original. Not because of his new ways, but because he stood unshakeably in the ancient way of his Father. Tapping into the eternal source of all that is good, true and beautiful, Jesus fills the world with His grace and truth. In this way, Jesus is the ultimate template for all great art, all great vision, all great life. If the son of God didn't try to invent something new, neither should you. Instead, let's realize that the good, beautiful and true have been given to us, given to the world at the very beginning of time, it is our job to recover, live and share them. The trick to being a great musician is to learn and imitate all of the great music of the past until that music lives through you. The trick to being a great leader in your field is to learn and imitate all of the great leaders until their leadership lives in you. The trick to leading a blessed life, is to learn and imitate the most blessed life ever lived, the life of Christ, until that life lives in you.

So then, in this Easter season, in this Ancient Armenian Church let us own up to the fact that many in the world will see us as 'Old & In the Way,' hopelessly behind the times in our ancient and obscure worship and texts. But stick around for a while and you will find that learning and imitating this old way can become a living way unto abundant life. For when we follow the life of our Lord, we imitate all that has been good, beautiful and true, and those virtues become alive in us. That's when, truly, we become 'Old & In The Way;' in the way of the Spirit, in the way of the Father, in the way of the Kingdom; now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.