

Sermon For Sunday, September 3, 2017 - From “Poor Me” to “Pour Me Out”

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 3, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Today we hear from two people who have good reason to feel sorry for themselves, good reason to say, “*poor me.*”

We hear from the prophet Jeremiah who is mocked, reviled, arrested and persecuted for his prophetic work. He laments to God, “Know that on your account I suffer insult.” He cries, “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?” - in other words, *poor me.*

We also hear from Jesus’ disciple, Peter, just as Peter is learning that his beloved teacher and friend is going to die. Peter has such high hopes for Jesus, hopes that don’t involve Jesus dying. He laments, “God forbid, this must never happen to you.” In other words, “God stop this or else *poor me.*”

Jeremiah and Peter both have good reasons to lament, as do many of us and so many people in our world today. When waters rise, when hatred surfaces, when our work isn’t respected, when someone we love is dying, we need to cry out with the prophets and the psalmists, “Where are you God, how long O Lord?”

Over a third of the Psalms are laments. The ancient prophets spent a lot of time lamenting. It’s OK to cry out to God in pain. Actually, it’s good to cry out to God in pain. Yet many of us don’t do this because we don’t want to complain, we don’t want to feel sorry for ourselves, we don’t want to get stuck in “*poor me.*” We know it isn’t good for anyone, most especially ourselves, if we get fixated on pain. The thing is, lamenting is different than complaining.

Laments differ from complaints in that laments are directed to God, spoken to God. Laments are prayers - even if they’re as short and simple as “Why God?”, “Where are you God?”, “Help us!” Also, God meets us in our laments. God hears our cries and cares for us in our pain. And God doesn’t leave us stuck there. God challenges us to move beyond lament into care for others in need. Rather than a refrain of “*poor me.*”, God calls us to say instead, “*pour me out, O God, open me to you and pour me out for the sake of the world.*” God moves us from a stance of *poor me* to a prayer of *pour me out.*

God does this for Jeremiah and Peter. God listens to Jeremiah’s troubles but then says, “Turn back to me and you will be my mouth, my words will pour out from you.”

In a similar way, Jesus gives Peter a very sharp challenge to his lament. Then Jesus teaches that we need to lose our lives in order to save them - we need to pour ourselves out so we can participate in the fullness of life God longs for us all to have.

God meets both Jeremiah and Peter in their laments to move them from a stance of “*poor me*” to a prayer of “*pour me out*”.

God does the same for us. When we’re hurting and in pain, God meets us there and opens us outward. God calls us into a way of being that brings healing for us and for others. This is the way of Jesus. Jesus did not avoid or deny suffering but rather entered it on the cross and poured himself out in love for the world. Jesus’ way of engaging suffering brought healing and new life out of the midst of pain and sorrow.

Now Jesus calls us to take up the cross, to follow him in this way - the way of pouring ourselves out for others. We’re called to let the pain of our lives open us to serving others so that we and they can experience healing.

We see this kind of thing happen all the time with people who have faced suffering. The Cajun Navy group that is helping Houston residents is made up of survivors of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Mothers who have lost children to drunk driving strive to prevent that from happening to other parents. Cancer survivors work to support cancer research and to help those who are ill. We see this pattern over and over in the world around us and in this congregation. Even when people don’t identify as Christian, when their suffering helps to pour themselves out for the world, they are following the way of Jesus. They are experiencing the truth of the cross - God brings new life and healing right at our broken places. God pours out love for a hurting world through each of us broken people.

Whenever we see people pouring themselves out for others we can give thanks and bear witness that this is the way of Jesus.

This way of Jesus brings healing, not just for those who are helped, but for those who serve. We are healed as we pour ourselves out because we are freed from a fixation on ourselves, from self-pity, from “*poor me.*” We are opened to more fully receive what we need from God and to freely share what we’ve been given with others.

Let’s take a moment now for silent prayer.