

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 10, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Marion Pruitt-Jefferson

First Reading: Genesis 3: 8-15; Psalm 130; Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4: 13-5:1; Gospel:
Mark 3: 20-35

Brief Reflections on the Scripture Readings – incorporating time for reflection

Beloved of God,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is officially summer now. School's out and the pool's open.....people are outside on their bikes, going for walks, hanging out at the Whippy Dip, or kayaking down the Upper Iowa. It's a season of the year when lots of regular activities are put on hold for a couple of months, and the often frantic pace of life slows down for time.

This morning I want us to be able to enjoy a little bit of a that summer time experience of slowing down - to take a few deep breaths, to open up just a bit of space in our lives to simply rest in God's presence and be unhurried by the world's demands.

For those of you worshipping with young children, please don't be worried about these small open spaces in this part of the service today.... we always, always welcome the sounds of children in our midst, even as we rest in God.

After each lesson, we'll have a few moments of silent reflection, followed by a brief commentary, and then another space for rest. This may feel really strange at first, but my hope is that you will simply let go of need to do something, and allow God's still small voice speak in your hearts, and minds and bodies.

First Lesson - Genesis 3:8-15

⁸[Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"¹⁰He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."¹¹He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"¹²The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

Reflection

The first couple are afraid, and ashamed, and are hiding from God – as if such a thing we’re really possible. They have disobeyed God and eaten from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Even though the narrative of the story suggests that God was ignorant of their wrongdoing, I’m pretty sure that the all-knowing, all-powerful God is perfectly well aware of what has taken place. And notice what God does. God comes to his beloved creatures, God still seeks fellowship with them, still desires to be in a relationship with them, even though they have disobeyed. God does not spurn them, or reject them, or even destroy them, as he said he would if they ate that forbidden fruit. Instead God goes to find them, and then asks them: What Happened? Adam first blames God – The woman YOU gave me, she made me do it - then blames Eve. Eve of course, blames the serpent who tricked her. They seem incapable of simply admitting that they messed up – and have done what they shouldn’t have. Why did they do that? Or more importantly, why do we do that – try to shift the blame and mitigate our own culpability? I think it’s because we doubt the possibility of real forgiveness, of ever being restored to a right relationship with someone we have hurt or wronged, or even with God. But this very first story about the consequences of sin has a loud and clear message for us – God does not, will not, and indeed cannot abandon us in our sin, or failure or brokenness. God persists in coming to us again and again, with generous forgiveness, taking us back into his arms of love and mercy. Yes there are very real consequences of sin. Adam and Eve are banished from the garden, and enter into the toil of daily life, earning their living by the sweat of their brow. But even outside the garden, God goes with them, and continues to tenderly care for them, making them clothing to wear, covering their shame with forgiveness, and providing for their needs. God just loves sinners.

Psalm 130

¹Out | of the depths

I cry to | you, O LORD;

²**O LORD, | hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my | supplication.

³If you were to keep watch | over sins,

O LORD, | who could stand?

⁴**Yet with you | is forgiveness,**

in order that you | may be feared. R

⁵I wait for you, O LORD; | my soul waits;

in your word | is my hope.

⁶**My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning,**

more than those who keep watch | for the morning.

⁷O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is | steadfast love;

with the LORD there is plen- | teous redemption.

⁸**For the LORD shall | redeem Israel**

from | all their sins. R

Reflection

Psalm 130 is considered to be a penitential psalm – a song that cries out for God’s forgiveness of sins. That’s why we usually sing this psalm during the season of Lent. You may remember that during Lent 2017, Brooke wrote a beautiful series of pieces for choir and soloist based upon this Psalm.

But I want to say to you that when I hear this psalm, I hear the voice of someone who is crying out to God from the depths of nearly unbearable emotional pain. I hear the cry of a person who is trapped in the depths of depression – with all the despair, anguish, and hopelessness that depression brings with it. Maybe that’s why I’m drawn to this psalm – because in the voice of the psalmist, I recognize my own life-long struggle with depression. When you are in the depths of depression, it feels as though you are living at the bottom of a deep pit – a place of isolation, estrangement, where there is no light, or hope.....a place where even death can begin to appear as a friend.

I disclose this to you because I know that it is so very, very difficult to talk about mental health issues. There is still such stigma and shame associated with depression and other mental illnesses. Even though medical science has begun to understand some of the physical causes of mental illness, many people, still believe that it is a sign of personal weakness, and that if we just tried harder to be like other people – who seem to be naturally optimistic, joyful, and positive, we would get over it – we could be bright and shiny like everyone else.

But that is not true. Healing for mental illness needs the attention of medical doctors, skilled counselors, a supportive community and the love and care of those closest to us. And equally important, we need to hear again and again that even in the depths of depression, God is with us. God does not abandon us to our deepest fears nor leave us in the depths of our despair. God’s will is for healing and wholeness for all of us – no matter the nature of our affliction. For with the Lord there is steadfast love – with the Lord there is plenteous redemption – plenteous healing for all that is wounded in our hearts, and minds and bodies. Please know that if you are struggling with depression, Pr. Amy and I are always available to talk with you and to pray with you, and to help you connect with other professional resources.

Second Lesson - 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1

¹³Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—”I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Reflection

So we do not lose hope.....

When Paul wrote these words to the church in Corinth, he himself was probably undergoing some great suffering. We know he had what he called a “thorn in his flesh” - some type of physical ailment that continued to afflict him. We know that at various times he was beaten and jailed, held in chains, publicly flogged, threatened with execution, and run out of town. And yet he proclaims: We Do Not Lose Hope – We do not lose hope, Paul says, because we know.....We know that God is always and continually at work in our lives and in our world to bring about renewal - and we believe that God’s good intentions, God’s will for us and for all creation will ultimately prevail. We do not lose hope, because we know that God is a God of Justice, and that God’s justice will be victorious over all of the faulty, frail, and false judgments of this world. We do not lose hope because we see in Jesus’ death and resurrection that God’s power and God’s great love overcome all death. We do not lose hope because we know that God’s creative and renewing Spirit is continually blowing through our world and our lives – and that this same Spirit, the Spirit through which everything that is was created – will bring us and all creation to completion and to what Paul describes as “an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”

Sisters and brothers, Where are those “even though” places in your life?In our country?In our World? Look closely, because those are the precisely the places where God shows up.

Holy Gospel - Mark 3:20-35

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” —³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my

Reflection

There is a lot of tough stuff in this passage, so I’ll say that if you want to talk about things like Beelzebul and demon possession and what it may mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, then let’s sit down together after worship – because what I want to talk about is the notion of Family.

Jesus had been out and about, gathering his disciples, and restoring countless numbers of people to health and wholeness, and now it's time to go home – maybe have a bit of rest. But a whole big crowd of people follow him – so many people with so many hurts, and wounds and pain that need Jesus' healing touch and tender care. Imagine if your daughter came home from college completely exhausted and a hundred other students followed her home and stood out in your yard and kept calling for her – Your my best friend, I need to talk to you.....Come out, I need you to help me study for my bio final.....Please....I just have to talk to you about my boyfriend,.....

I imagine it was something like that for Jesus' mom and siblings. They could see how tired Jesus was, and how all that helping and healing had just worn him down, until it was so bad that people were saying that he was losing it. So they step in to protect Jesus – to get him to rest, and recover himself. But Jesus refuses to be restrained – even by those who love him and want the best for him. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God has come near, and Jesus will not be limited by any forces that stand in the way of his mission – not even those in his own family.

So when Jesus is sitting in the neighbor's house, in a room crowded with all those hurting people, and his kinfolk come to take care of him, he won't be moved. No matter what it costs him, and it will cost him his life, he will not abandon all those people for whom he has such deep compassion. When they tell him his family is outside waiting for him, Jesus simply looks around at all those people that his heart is reaching out to, and he says: Here is my family. Notice that he doesn't say that his mom and siblings are not his family – he just knocks down that barrier of the small and narrow definition of family, and opens it wide to include, well, everyone – all of you gathered here this morning, all those who cannot be with us, all those who have gone before us, all those who are lonely and isolated and struggling to find a place where they belong, all people who long for a genuine sense of connection.

Jesus throws open the door and lets everyone in – calls everyone to sit at table at with him and with one another and to feast on the bread and wine which fill us with Jesus' own life – for our own healing and wholeness, and for the sake of the world that God so dearly loves.