

Sermon for Sunday, November 3, 2019 - "Justice and Healing"

All Saints Sunday
November 3, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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[Click here to see scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

I don't like hearing Jesus say, "woe to you"- especially on All Saints Sunday. On this day, I just want to grieve and give thanks for the saints who've gone before us. And, as we do that, I want to focus on God's words of comfort and promise for us all.

I don't want to hear, "woe to you who are rich ... (because we're all rich in comparison to just about everyone else who's ever lived on this planet). I don't want to hear, "woe to you who are full now ... woe to you who laugh". These words of judgement feel so harsh. The end of our Psalm today feels even more harsh as we hear about God's people wreaking vengeance on the nations and inflicting God's judgement.

On All Saints Sunday, I want to focus on God's presence with us in our suffering - wiping away our tears and making for us a feast of rich foods and well-aged wines. God with us in times of sorrow and struggle is such good news.

And yet, God's judgement is also good news for us because it is one way that God brings healing.

God is active in the face of our suffering. God doesn't just say, "I am so sorry for your pain. I wish I could do something to help." God doesn't just offer nice phrases like leaders who say, "My thoughts and prayers are with the victims," and yet take no action.

God *is* with us in suffering, but God is also actively at work to heal us.

And one of the ways God brings healing is to convey judgement about our ways of being that are harmful to us and other people.

We may not always want to hear this message and yet, in our suffering, we need more than empathy. We also need to address the things that contribute to it.

This reminds me of a very funny video called "It's Not About the Nail." The video, which admittedly reinforces gender stereotypes - plays with the idea that women don't want men to try to fix our suffering, offering advice and problem solving. We want you to listen and empathize. Yet, there are times when there is something causing us pain that could be fixed.

The video starts out with a woman talking to her male partner and you see just part of her face. She says, "It's just, there's all this pressure, you know. And sometimes it feels like it's right up on me and I can just feel it - like literally feel it in my head and it's relentless ... " She turns and you can see that she has a nail sticking out of her forehead.

The man replies, "Ya, well you do a have a nail in your head."

"it is not about the nail," she answers.

"Are you sure," he asks, "because, I mean, I bet if we got that out of there ..."

She interrupts, "You always do this – you always try to fix things when all I really need is for you to just listen."

"No, see, I don't know if that *is* what you need; I think what you need is to get the nail out."

Finally, she persuades him to just listen as she describes how she's not sleeping well and all of her sweaters are snagged, literally all of the sweaters.

He listens and says, "That sounds really hard." She's grateful and they go to kiss, but the nail gets in the way.

It's very funny, look for it on YouTube.

In our suffering, we all need people who are simply with us in the pain (and, I have to say, not man- splaining!) Yet, we also need to address what is leading to the suffering, especially because it's rarely as obvious as a nail sticking out of our head.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus lets us know that our compassionate God is so very present with us in struggle and is especially present to those most in need. Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.

Jesus *also* calls our attention to things that can be harmful - especially money, abundance, merri-ment and respect. These things are often viewed as a sign of God's favor. Yet, here and throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus asks us to take another look at them.

Wealth and ease can lead to an arrogance that corrodes our lives, blunting our sense of solidarity with and responsibility towards others. Excess wealth and food can whet our appetite for more and more, leading us to harm our earthly home. We can become infected with fear and violence as we try to defend what we have. Respect can lead us to crave praise at the expense of truth and integrity. And when we have all these things, there is no room for God who is the source of our life and hope, there is no room for real community. All of this can leave us empty and alone.

God longs for us to live connected to each other in ways that allow all to flourish. So, Jesus says take heed, watch out for the things that can get in the way of that. These things that you think are a sign of God's favor can be like a nail in your head.

Then, Jesus continues with guidance about how to live differently, how to address that nail. Love your enemies, pray for those who harm you, share with those in need, do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is the way of Jesus, the way that leads to healing for us and for this whole suffering world.

This is the way of the whole communion of saints to which we belong. The saints before us have heard Jesus' words of judgment and forgiveness and have lived differently as a result. They have sought God's justice and mercy for the nations, for those who are poor, hungry, weeping and persecuted. They have loved, prayed, forgiven and shared. Through them, God has been so very active.

God doesn't just say, I'm so sorry for your suffering.

God speaks a word of judgement and forgiveness to the saints, including each of us. God's word changes lives and brings healing to the world - as the saints live in the way of Jesus.

Dear saints of God, we, too, can live in the way of Jesus because our just and compassionate God is with us always, with you always. We have all that we need for lives of justice and joy.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.