

Wednesday Evening Service, June 3, 2020 - Reflection

“Long, Loving Look - Practice Contemplation”

Pastor Amy Zalk Larson

The Message Translation of Psalm 77

- 1 I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs. He listens.*
- 2 I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord; my life was an open wound that wouldn't heal. When friends said, "Everything will turn out all right," I didn't believe a word they said.*
- 3 I remember God - and shake my head. I bow my head - then wring my hands.*
- 4 I'm awake all night - not a wink of sleep; I can't even say what's bothering me.*
- 5 I go over the days one by one, I ponder the years gone by.*
- 6 I strum my lute all through the night, wondering how to get my life together.*
- 7 Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good? Will he never smile again?*
- 8 Is his love worn threadbare? Has his salvation promise burned out?*
- 9 Has God forgotten his manners? Has he angrily stalked off and left us?*
- 10 "Just my luck," I said. "The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him."*
- 11 Once again I'll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders;*
- 12 I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts.*

I'm struck by this verse:

- 12 I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts.*

Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt once described contemplation as taking a “long, loving look at the real.” Tonight, I want to invite you to practice contemplation as you look at our world this week. As we were invited to do this past Sunday, we are called to look and look again at the pain of the world. Yet, we are also called to look with love. Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey talks about how he learned to look at the world with love. I’ve shared this story before, but it is speaking to me again this week. Just after graduating from law school, Cory Booker moved into a low-income housing area in New Jersey because he wanted to make a difference in a struggling community. He sought out Ms. Virginia, the building president, to say, “Mam, I’m here to help.” Ms. Virginia looked skeptical. He made sure to tell her he was a graduate of Stanford and Yale Law School - mentioned that a few times, actually. She didn’t seem overjoyed by his presence, so he just kept talking.

Finally, she interrupted him and said, “Follow me.” She led him down to the street and said, “Tell me what you see.” Booker described the crack houses, the crime, the things that had been stolen from his car the night he moved in - all the problems. The more he talked, the more disappointed she looked. Finally, she shook her head, “You can’t help me,” and she walked away.

Booker the lawyer ran and caught up with her, “What do you mean, what are you talking about?” he asked. Ms. Virginia turned and said, “Boy, you need to understand something. The world you see outside of you is a reflection of what you have inside you. If you are one of those people who only sees darkness and despair and problems, that’s all there’s gonna to be. But, if you are one of those stubborn people who every time you open your eyes you see beauty, you see love, you see possibilities, you see the face of God - then you can be one of those people who helps me.”

What we see matters.

Jesus must so often look at us the same way Ms. Virginia looked at Cory Booker - grieved at our hardness of heart and our inability to really see one another. Jesus must so often want to take us out on the streets of our country and ask us, "Tell me, what do you see?" If Jesus asked us this, I think we'd tell him about all the problems, all the difficult people who just don't get it, who need to be corrected. "*They* are so angry, so judgmental, so extreme." And then I think Jesus would say something like, "The world you see outside of you is a reflection of what you have inside of you." Jesus sees all of that junk inside each of us and it grieves him. But that isn't all he sees ...

- Jesus also sees so much beauty, love and possibility, so much of God in each and every one of us.
- Jesus sees you for who you truly are - beloved, precious child of God and beautiful to behold.
- Jesus gazes upon us with love.

Being regarded in this way, with love, can change our hearts and help us to see differently. God made you and God adores you.

Whenever we judge and condemn each other, as we all do in so many ways, God looks upon us with anger, grieved at our hardness of heart. Yet even then, God also looks upon us with such love. God always sees beyond all our faults and failings. God always sees *you* as a beloved, precious child of God and beautiful to behold.

May God's long, loving look at each of us change our hearts - may it help us to see one another with love.