

Sermon for Sunday, July 5, 2020 - "Burdens Carried"

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

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

There is a lot going on in this passage, but I want to invite you to again hear Jesus' words near the end of the passage and imagine Jesus speaking them directly to you. Jesus says to you today: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Beloved of God, I know you are weary and burdened today. Jesus knows you are weary and burdened. Jesus gives you rest. Receive this rest and this care today.

Please don't diminish your own weariness, your own burdens by saying, "I know others have it so much worse." Don't fall into the trap of comparative suffering. Emotions researcher Brene Brown describes how comparative suffering happens. She writes, "Fear and scarcity immediately trigger comparison, and even pain and hurt are not immune to being assessed and ranked." In this time when fear and scarcity are rampant, we are so often engaging in this comparative suffering, saying things like, "I shouldn't complain about the family reunion being cancelled because others have lost family members." "I'm overwhelmed by the challenges of my job during a pandemic, but it could be so much worse - I could be unemployed." "The pain of black Americans is so great so why am I complaining?"

Brene Brown points out that comparative suffering comes from the belief that empathy is finite, the idea that If you practice empathy and kindness with yourself, you will have less to give for the people who really need it.

But empathy doesn't work that way. When we practice empathy for ourselves and others, we create more empathy. The ER doctor in Texas doesn't benefit more if you conserve your kindness only for her and withhold it from yourself or from your neighbor who is lonely. The family of George Floyd doesn't benefit more if you just ignore your own pain right now. Certainly, we do need to practice perspective as we consider our own struggles and the pain of the world. We do need to be aware of our own privilege and work to dismantle it. Yet, when we acknowledge our own pain, it can help open us to the pain of others.

I saw this at work last Sunday when we had a Zoom Adult Forum on White Privilege in the ELCA. Our facilitator, Jon Ailabouni, read a list of the privileges that most European Americans experience in the ELCA and people of color do not. These include things like: "When I enter the church office, I am not given directions to the food shelf unless I ask for them;" "When I read Scripture in church, no one congratulates me on being "so articulate." Jon asked us to listen to the 26 statements and discern for ourselves, 'yes' or 'no', if we felt we had these privileges. Some of the women and LGBTQ people in the group had higher levels of 'no' answers. For instance, as a clergy woman, as I reflect on my experience in the larger church, I said 'no' to 5 statements, including: "It is not likely that people will talk over me when I am trying to share;" and "People are

rarely surprised by the fact that I am employed or by my choice of career.”

I was struck that those who had said ‘no’ to some statements had a deep empathy for how difficult it is to feel welcome as a person of the color in most ELCA congregations. An awareness of their struggle with feeling excluded helped to open them to the pain of others, it made them want to be even more welcoming to others.

So please dear ones, don’t feel you need to ration empathy and love, practice it for yourself and for others. Empathy is not finite. It grows as we receive it and offer it.

Today hear and receive Jesus’ words to you, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Notice, too, that the rest Jesus gives us isn’t escape from the world. Jesus says we are to take his yoke upon ourselves and learn from him. We are to take up his work of loving God and loving others and loving this hurting world wholeheartedly - with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are to join Jesus’ work of healing and redeeming the world. Jesus says that this yoke is easy and that this burden is light. Sometimes I want to say really Jesus? It doesn’t always feel that way.

Loving others, loving this world wholeheartedly, feels really hard some days, most days right now, actually. It feels heavy and wearisome to try to be responsible and community-minded during this pandemic, especially when so many are choosing not to act the same. It feels heavy and wearisome to try to address white privilege when so many won’t even acknowledge it exists within our congregation, community and country.

Yet, when Jesus calls us to take up his yoke, he is saying we don’t have to do this work of loving the world alone. He is reminding us that we are yoked with him the way one ox is yoked with another so they can pull in tandem. We don’t have to do the work of loving the world on our own. Instead, we are joined to this work with Jesus.

And as my friend Stacey Nalean-Carlson puts it, “Yoked with Christ—united with him in baptism—there is no burden we carry that isn’t shared by him. The full weight is never ours to bear alone.” She also points out that, “We also learn from the one whose yoke we wear. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. The Greek word translated here as ‘humble’ describes one who depends on the Lord rather than self, one who is God-reliant rather than self-reliant.* We learn from Jesus how to entrust all our burdens to God. On the cross, as Jesus bore the full weight of loving this world to the end, he cried out to God, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Jesus lived and died - loved and lost, wept and rejoiced - relying on God’s love for him and for the world.” Yoked with him we learn how to do this. He shares our burdens as we do this.

And as Pr. Stacey says so beautifully, “When I picture being yoked with Jesus, I actually imagine an endless yoke circling around the world, all God’s people united by Christ – the church on earth and the church in heaven – carrying that burden of love for the world together.”

Beloved of God, you who are weary and heavy laden, Jesus gives you rest.

You are yoked with Christ Jesus and with all God’s people.

There is no burden you carry that is not shared.

Receive Christ’s love and compassion for you today.

Remember you are joined with Christ Jesus and Christ’s church as you share that compassion with the world.

Sources

Brene Brown:

<https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-on-comparative-suffering-the-50-50-myth-and-settling-the-ball/>

Greek translation: <https://biblehub.com/greek/5011.htm>

Pastor Stacey Nalean-Carlson: <http://staceynaleancarlson.com/2019/12/22/light-advent-day-22/>