

Sermon for Sunday, November 15, 2020 - "From Outrage into Community"

Twenty-fourth 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.

Before we begin, I should probably make it very clear that I did not choose these readings for this Stewardship Sunday. This Sunday, like every Sunday, we're using the assigned readings for the day from the larger church's common set of readings called the lectionary.

The lectionary helps keep preachers and congregations honest. We don't get to just pick the readings we like, the ones that make us feel good, that reinforce what we already think. Today is a perfect example. I would have chosen texts that were a lot less angry, especially given what things are like in the US right now.

I'm feeling so weary of all the anger in our country, all the outrage around me and within me. I know so many of you share this weariness. Certainly, there are many reasons to be angry. And anger isn't necessarily bad - it can provide focus and energy to address problems. Yet, right now it feels like we're just stuck in outrage. There is such a focus on angrily calling people out for what they do wrong. This "call out" culture increases negativity and polarization. It can also leave us paralyzed - afraid to act or speak lest we do something that will provoke the outrage of others. Instead of calling each other out, I long for us to call each other in - into dialogue, into community where we can offer our gifts and work together for the common good.

Our scripture readings today speak to both being called out and called in.

In the reading from the prophet Zephaniah, God does call us out and convict us. God says, "I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.'" God also says, "I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung."

All that makes your friend's angry Facebook posts sound like Mr. Rogers in comparison.

Scripture shows us that God does get angry because God is passionate about how we live together here on earth. God wants shalom for all. Shalom is a beautiful Hebrew word that means well-being, peace and justice for all of creation. God gets angry when human sin prevents shalom. We shouldn't get complac-

cent and assume that God is uninvolved, unimpacted by what we do. God cares deeply. God is passionate, a word that at root means to suffer. Scripture shows a God who suffers because of our sin.¹ And, God convicts us when we are lazy, complacent or complicit. That is good news for all who are oppressed.

Yet God doesn't just call us out. In Jesus we see that our passionate God has chosen to be compassionate, a word that means to be with the suffering of others. God has entered into this world of sin and injustice to be with us, to call us in - into loving relationship, into life-giving community. In that relationship, in this community, God pours out faith, hope, love, joy and forgiveness. We are given all that we need to increase God's shalom in the world and experience it ourselves.

In this way, God is like the Master in the gospel parable today who entrusts his workers with all his property, all that he owns. Each worker gets a major gift, one talent was equivalent to fifteen years of wages. They don't all get the same amount, but they all have major resources available to them. God also entrusts us with resources, talents, abundant gifts. We each have been given so much to make our world whole. God expects us to use these gifts, to invest ourselves in the world, to take risks for the sake of the world God so loves.

Yet, one of the workers in the parable chooses not to do anything with what he's been given. Rather than gratefully receiving his gift and getting to work, he hides it. Rather than putting the gift to work, he ruminates about the master's temperament and the situation. Perhaps he gets fixated on why he only got one talent rather than five, and feels sorry for himself. Maybe he thinks he doesn't have enough for himself or enough to make a difference. Maybe he feels put upon by being asked to do something more when he feels like he's already done enough. He confesses to a fear of not measuring up to the master's expectations, that fear of being called out for doing something wrong that we know all too well.

I get all of these things. I've been to all those dark places; sometimes I go to each of them many times a day.

But when I go to any of those places of fear, jealousy, inadequacy or avoidance, I miss out on entering into the joy God gives and on the chance to participate with God in making the world more just, more well. I find myself stuck in darkness, weeping, gnashing my teeth - outraged and despairing about the state of the world and my own heart. What little hope I did have is taken away.

But God does not leave me there.

God doesn't leave us stuck in these places. God does not leave us buried. Our compassionate God continues to call us out from all the things that trap us, all the dark places we hide. God continues to call us into abundant life with Christ and into Christian community. God goes even further than calling us in, God actually draws us into the joy of God's presence even when we are prone to resist. And, God continues to pour out the resources of faith, hope, love, joy and forgiveness into our hearts. Day after day, week after week in worship, God calls us out, draws us in, and pours out abundance upon us.

All of this allows us to be compassionate, hopeful, peaceful people in this difficult time. As people who have been convicted and forgiven, called out and drawn in, we have what we need to move beyond outrage to enter into dialogue and relationships with others. We have what we need to offer ourselves to this world, working for God's justice and God's shalom.

¹To read more about this, consider Terrance Fretheim's book: *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Fortress Press, 1984.

Beloved of God, you who live with and among fear and outrage and despair, you are loved, you are held, you are claimed by our compassionate God.

You can invest in this world.

You can be with and for others even when they are angry and unhelpful.

You can give freely of yourself for this world that God so loves.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.