

Sermon for July 31, 2022
Traveling with the Spirit Summer Series
Scripture: Acts 15:1-12
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Decorah, IA
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Open to Change

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

This summer, as Good Shepherd has been *traveling with the Spirit*, worship has featured pilgrimage psalms- psalms prayed while traveling to holy places.

Last week during the youth trip, our Decorah group got to take our own pilgrimage- to the George Floyd Global Memorial.

The community around the memorial has organized to offer what they call *pilgrimage tours* to help guests to enter that sacred space.

What we saw and learned at the memorial changed us.

Like those apostles in Acts, whose eyes were opened to God's presence among the Gentiles, our eyes were opened to God's presence in the community around the George Floyd memorial.

I'm excited to tell you more about it today.

Yet our pilgrimage to the memorial opened my eyes in other ways.

It also helped me recognize that so much of what we did on the trip,

and so much of *all* our lives, is about pilgrimage-

about learning to recognize what is holy all around us, as we travel through this life.

First, I want to tell you about the George Floyd Global Memorial.

It has truly become a holy place.

Hearts are broken open. There is space to grieve. Black bodies are honored.

Resilience, justice, and community are celebrated and nurtured.

Our pilgrimage tour guides were Marquise, Georgio, and Kendrick.

As we took in the art, the flowers, and the Say Their Names cemetery,

our guides shared about their painful experiences with the Minneapolis police, about loved ones lost to gun violence.

They introduced us to a man who'd been wrongfully imprisoned for 18 years.

The guides shared honestly about the challenges while still remaining hopeful,

after each painful story Kendrick would say, "where there's people, there's power."

They hoped we would use our power to join in the work of racial justice.

We also met Jay, a man who runs a plant hospital at the site.

He receives dying houseplants, restores them,

and then finds new homes for them at the memorial garden.

Jay came over to our group and started preaching the Gospel.
He told us the key to world peace is two words- you matter, you matter.
What would have happened, he asked us,
if Derek Chauvin had seen George Floyd and recognized “you matter”?

What would happen if we all approached ourselves and one another
with that awareness- “you matter”?
You matter not because of what you do or think or achieve,
not because of your appearance, job, degrees, or number of followers-
you matter, period.
It sounds so simple, yet we continually need our eyes opened
to this truth about ourselves, this truth about others.
Each person is God’s beloved, each person can help us to know more of God.

Our lives are a journey, a pilgrimage,
of learning to recognize the holy within ourselves, others, all of creation.

In that sense, our whole youth trip was a pilgrimage.
As we served, played, danced, sang, laughed, ate, napped, and toured together-
we got the chance to experience God in other people and in God’s beautiful world.

It is so easy to overlook God’s presence in others.
We judge, we stand at a distance, we fear.

Yet the good news is that God is committed to opening our eyes again and again.

God has made a pilgrimage to us- traveling to be with us in Christ Jesus,
coming among us to honor this holy, sacred earth and each life here.

God, in Christ, is now present everywhere, in all people.
God is at work to help us know that each person and all creation matters,
to let this truth shape how we live and play, love and serve.
You matter.
Let that truth sink in and change you again today.

Now we get to hear from our youth about how they were impacted by the trip.