

6-27-21 5th Pentecost

[Gary Sponholtz plays and sings "There Is A Balm in Gilead"]

Hello friends.

We gather here for our final worship in the month of June, days of heat and intensity, but also great celebration with our *Labyrinth Uplift* [dedication] this past Sunday. For all these we are thankful to God. Let us begin in the name of the Holy One, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit.

God, renew us with your life-giving Spirit, that we may enjoy these days of summer's abundance, relax within to receive the teachings of your grace, find comfort in caring for those we love, and continue to open our hearts to receive the gifts of new people, and friends, and experiences. We pray in Christ's name.

The first lesson is from **Lamentations, chapter 3**. [3: 22-33]

Think of this in light of our COVID, Black Lives Matter, and earth crises season of last year. So now we get to hear--

Surely, God's mercies are not over; God's deeds of faithful love are not exhausted; every morning they are renewed; great, great is God's faithfulness! 'God is all I have,' I say to myself, 'and so I shall put my hope in God.' God is good to those who trust him, good to all who search for God. It is good for us to wait in silence upon God, who will rescue us. It is good for someone to bear the yoke from a young age, to sit in solitude and silence when the times weigh heavy. It is good to lay one's head in the dust--maybe there is hope. It is good to offer one's cheek to the striker, and to have moments of disgrace. The Lord will not reject anyone forever. God will bring mercy to our grieving.

From **2 Corinthians**, Paul writes,

Friends, you are rich in everything--faith, eloquence, understanding, concerns for everything, and love for us, too. Then make sure that you excel in the work of generosity also. I'm not saying this as an order, but testing the genuineness of your love against the concerns of others. You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Christ had, and that, although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that we should become rich through his poverty. What I'm saying is there should be a

fair balance. Providing your surplus to others at present may fill their deficit, and, at another time their surplus may fill your deficit. So let there be a fair balance among you. The Scripture says, No one who had collected more had too much, and no one who collected less had too little.

[Gary Sponholtz sings Psalm 91--'Be with Me Lord When I am in Trouble']

The Gospel for today is from **Mark, chapter 5**.
We're taking the central healing story for our text.

Now, there was a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for 12 years, and after long and painful treatment by her various doctors, she had spent all she had without being the any better for it. In fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking, 'If I can just touch the hem of his garment, I will be saved.' And, at once, the source of her bleeding stopped, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her illness. And, at once, the power had gone out of Jesus. He turned around, faced the crowd and said, 'Who touched me?' His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is swarming around you? How can you ask, 'Who touched me?' But he continued to look all around to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling, because she knew what happened to her. She fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. 'My daughter,' said Jesus, 'Your faith has restored you to health. Go in peace, and be free of your illness.'

Thanks be to God.

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In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It has been said that the only true spiritual teacher is disappointment. It cuts you off at the knees. It brings a harsh and clear perception of what is really happening in a situation, or context, or within one's self. That's a tough teaching.

It has also been said--I believe by Jacob Needleman, the great psychologist-psychoanalyst--he said, "After a hundred plus years of psychotherapy, there's only one thing we know for sure, and that is that

only love changes people, only love. Knowing we're loved, being in love, sharing that love, changes people. Everything else remains behavior modification.” Think about that.

These two expressions permeate our text for today: ‘Disappointment as harsh teacher’, and, ‘Love is the only teacher’. The *Lamentations* text is both profound and dangerous. It is good to be heartbroken; it is good to lay your head in the dust; it is good to taste moments of disgrace, profound--and dangerous. Profound because we can learn things in this experience; dangerous because the temptation is to think that it is praising suffering. And that's a falsehood.

There is no praise and worship of suffering in our Scriptures or tradition. Unfortunately, the Christian church has--to a great extent--seemed to be in the business of praising suffering. The more you suffer, the better you are, the deeper your faith, these kinds of things. That is perverse.

Through COVID, and all that accompanied it this past year and a half, we can now perceive life in new ways, and with new priorities, and we need to live into them. But will the motivation of our faith and that calling be deep enough to carry us through—or do we fall back into old ruts and habits?

This jacket I'm wearing I acquired in Japantown, many decades ago. It was already worn, well-worn. When I got it, I asked the salesperson if there was any meaning in the jacket, and she said it was a laborer's jacket, that is for sure. And it probably belonged to a window washer, because this Japanese symbol--which I'll show you on the back of the jacket--is the symbol for ‘clean’ or ‘clear’. I hope you love it.

Window washers. What do they do? It's pretty simple. Just clean windows—20, 30, 40 stories in the sky--risking their lives so that people on the inside can see out with a *clear view*. That's what these texts are about today.

In Corinthians, Paul asked the community, ‘Do you realize how rich you are in all of the things that matter, that really count in this life--rich in faith, in eloquence, in care, and compassion for others? Do you realize the bounty of which you are a part? Has it become *clear* to you?’ If so, Paul encourages them to meet the needs of others. Is that *clear*? Because when

we do that, then the others become sisters and brothers. We participate in the grand mutual exchange of understanding, compassion, and care. Oh, and by the way, you may be able to share at this time; maybe in the future you will need to ask them to share with you.

The gospel story of the woman's hemorrhage, bleeding 12 years, very, very intense. And this woman, reaches out in desperation, and says to herself, 'If I can touch even just the hem of his garment, I may be healed.' Jesus, we hear, is being swarmed by the crowds. You know, this was a frequent experience. Can we imagine that? (We tend to think of him sort of by himself alone, austere.) [He was swarmed by the crowds, a rock star, they can't get enough of him. But he turns and asks this question. Hence, suddenly, 'Who touched me because he felt the energy, that healing energy flowing out of him. The disciples thought it was ridiculous. What are you talking about? But he knew, he knew the connection was real.

She, and this is a huge part of the story, was an unknown, unclean person, and by touching him she made Jesus unclean. But Jesus is not offended by her. It was clear to him how profound her faith was in him. He does not condemn, he praises her.

This whole matter of uncleanness is a very common thread in the Scriptures. We hear it all the time, but the truth is, most of us go, *'That's kind of bizarre, isn't it? I mean you should wash up to your elbows, and all the ritual practices, and trying to keep pure, and going through the motions. I just don't get why it bothered those people so much.'*

And then it struck me, quite recently, that the equivalent in our day and age is racism. There's not a single thing that you can do about the color of your skin with which you've been born, wherever you are on the spectrum from light to dark, right? Nothing. It is utterly silly to condemn people for their color or culture. It's just who and how we are as human beings.

But we do it, don't we, with the most ferocious attacks, condemning others simply for their color. They may as well be unclean. In fact, that's how we consider them, right? *'Don't contaminate me with your views of the world, with your attitudes, with your culture.'* We become fearful, we become paranoid. We're doing the same thing.

And Jesus welcomed the unclean, and became himself contaminated by their company. He was so fouled in the view of the religious leaders of his day that he was worthy of being executed.

Shall we become clear and clean when it comes to racism? Shall we open our hearts to be connected, as Paul says, with the largesse which we have received, in order to build the lives of those in need, to become equal partners, sharing in the balance of all of God's good gifts? The answer is Yes--in case you're in doubt. Yes, we shall. All it is that to which we are called, because the solution to uncleanness is communion--with those who hurt, those who are longing to live in the fullness of God's love for them. That will make us whole too. Thanks be to God.

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In our prayers today, we ask God's mercy upon:

Margit, Karen, Dale, Bob, Brian,
Mark, Maili, Moriah,
Dana, Marshall, John, Dennis.
Lenny, Heather, Rodger, Cory,
Mary, Joanne, and Arlene and family in their grief.
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And we ask that the spirit of this Solstice season might inspire us to keep turning toward the newness and strength of the Gospel, turning towards each other, turning towards God in prayer and beauty and the arts, turning always toward the light that heals us, and heals us into God's people, now and into the great beyond. For this we pray, O God. Amen.

Glory be to God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit, and upon us weak and wounded people, upon us beautiful and amazing creatures. May mercy and compassion be shed in both worlds, now and forever.
Amen.

[Gary Sponholtz plays and sings 'Rock of Ages']