

Lamentations 3:19-26 ~ 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Rekindle the Gift

October 6, 2019 ~ World Communion Sunday ~ 17th after Pentecost

Communion Meditation

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Rachel is a mom I know who was gifted with not just one, but three babies at once. Yes, triplets: Anna, Brigid, and Claire, (“A, B, & C” she would call them when she was in a hurry). Anna, Brigid, and Claire were three lively toddlers, each with their own ideas of which way to run. You can imagine the physical challenge of getting all three dressed and out the door in time for church every Sunday. Why she made this extraordinary effort came clear to me and everyone else in the room at a congregational meeting one morning, in a single phrase in a phrase I will never forget. She said, “I bring my children to church so that they will know Jesus.” Why do you bring your children to church? Why did any of us make the effort to be here today?

Perhaps you’ve seen the New Yorker cartoon that has a clergyman standing at a crossroads where he is struggling to decide between two signposts. One has an arrow and points to “Heaven.” The other has an arrow that points to “Discussion about Heaven.” And he is standing there, struggling to decide which way to go. Presbyterian pastor and author Lilian Daniel writes, “Sometime, I think we in the church stand at the same crossroads, stuck between “Jesus” and “Discussion about Jesus.” This is particularly true of thoughtful, intelligent people who are not afraid to ask questions about the Bible and the history and culture of Jesus’ day. We are so comfortable, that we are better at articulating what we do not believe about Jesus intellectually than saying what we do believe about him personally.”ⁱ

While I think her words ring true for many of us thoughtful, intelligent Presbyterians, I don’t think we came here this morning just to have a discussion *about* Jesus. There are many other places we could be, plenty of other good things we could choose to be doing. I think you have decided to be here, (or someone you love has decided for you) to give yourself a chance to touch Grace and to taste Love Divine. It’s been a long week. Our Milwaukee Brewers suffered a painful, heart-breakingly abrupt end to their season. The craziness in our national politics has reached a new pitch. Surely today, our Holy Spirit spark plugs are gunked up with all that life may be throwing at us from every direction. So here we come from east and west, north and south, for something. Perhaps a tune-up. A re-set. We come because we need Jesus to rekindle our spirits--no matter how beat down they may be. I think we came for something more than a *discussion about Jesus*.

Think for a moment: How did you get to know Jesus, in your hearts and guts and bones? We are not born knowing Jesus, consciously. There must have been someone who loved you like Jesus does. There must have been someone who told you the story of Jesus: stories about his life, how he lived, what he taught us, how he died and was resurrected. In that moment when we know Jesus, we realize we are not alone. We know that we know Jesus when we realize that no matter what biological family we may have been born into---we are all related. Look around

the room—yes, one family. One family that stretches all around the world, for generations upon generations: from the beginning of people inhabiting this earth.

You may have heard of the online service, “Ancestry.com.” Some of you may have used it and discovered surprising connections with cousins and siblings you never knew you had. And perhaps you also discovered surprising proportions of different races and ethnicities in your DNA. There’s so much more to all of us than meets the eye! My husband’s family has discovered of late a particularly large percentage of Neanderthal in their bloodline...Interesting. You may have noticed the tag lines for Ancestry.com that they use to hook you into their service, “20 million members have connected to a deeper family story.” And, “There’s no better way to find generations of your family and their stories.” That may be true.

We are here today because Jesus has given us an even better way. Yes: at this Table. We are here today, particularly on World Communion Sunday, because we *do know* of an even better way not only to find, but to connect spiritually, soul-to-soul, with all the generations of God’s family, our siblings currently living—7.7 Billion as of August 2019, and everyone else since the beginning of humans on this earth. That sounds like a tall order, I know. But here is how Jesus taught us to do it: We tell the story, then we break bread together at this Table of Grace. This morning we are worshipping in three languages, spoken in four different continents to help us hear the sound of global grace.

We tell the story, then we break bread together. Today’s stories, from Lamentations and from 2 Timothy, offer up two servings from two individuals who are suffering, tearful, and at their wit’s end. Except that they know God’s steadfast love deep in their bones: Bones and guts that would be sinking, drowning in the depths of despair, otherwise. Truthfully, we do not know who wrote either of these beautiful texts. One, a lament; the other a letter. More importantly, we do know when they were written and why. Lamentations issues forth from the depths of the Babylonian Exile, when God’s people were captives in a foreign land, about 500 years before Christ. And it was bad. Really bad. Listen to verses 7-9, and 14, in this same chapter 3:

“He has walled me about so I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me; though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; he has blocked my ways with hewn stones...

I have become the laughing stock of all my people, the object of their taunt-songs all day long.”

(Obviously bullying and shaming didn’t start with FaceBook--Remember Cain and Abel back in Genesis 4?) Honestly the writer at this point sounds close to considering suicide. But then comes the turn, the life-saving turn in verse 21: “But this I call to mind, therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” How did he know this? How was he able to call it to mind? Someone had to teach him. Someone had to show him this love.

Our second story from 2 Timothy, although attributed to Paul in its title, had to have been written as late as 100 CE past Paul’s life on earth, when the church has been established already for three generations. And six hundred years after our first lesson, yet here we have another suffering servant, writing tearfully but also shimmering with hope, eager to share it with young Timothy, in the midst of Timothy’s struggles. How can he do that? He knows Christ, he

lives for Christ, and he reminds Timothy to lay hold of this love made known by his mother, Eunice and his grandmother, Lois. He is not alone. All he needs to do is rekindle the gift that is within him: transgenerational and unconditional. A gift that Timothy did not earn. The meta-family of God is not a meritocracy. That's why it is called a Table of Grace, with places for everyone to gather and rekindle the gift. A place to eat the bread and drink the cup and know Jesus.

In the gathering, Jesus is made known to us. As Jesus said in Matthew, "Where two or three are gathered, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20) The knowing comes in the being together with a group of people only God could have put together. Sara Miles, spiritual writer who was raised as an atheist discovered as a young adult, "What happened once I started distributing communion was the truly disturbing, dreadful realization about Christianity: You can't be a Christian by yourself...Sooner or later, if I kept participating in communion, I'd have to swallow the fact of my connection with all other people, without exception."ⁱⁱ

When we recognize our place in the family of creation, the gift is rekindled. When we recognize our place at this table, the gift of God is rekindled, peace is possible. *As you come to the table*, take a moment to think about who God has used in your life who showed you Jesus, someone who rekindled your gift—especially when all seemed to be lost. You may think of a parent, grandparent, teacher, friend, who has already joined the church triumphant. That person is with us at this table that traverses heaven and earth. You will get to commune with that person at this table, where we get to time travel and realm travel. Who has been your lifeline? *As you come to the table*, also take a moment to think about a person in your life that God may be calling you to be the one to rekindle their gift. Bring that person with you in your heart to the Table of Grace. God may be calling you to be their lifeline this week.

I don't think you came here today just to "tick the box" that says "went to church." I think you came here today to touch grace and taste Love Divine, for Christ's sake.

ⁱ Lillian Daniel, *When "Spiritual But Religious" Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church*, (Jericho Books: New York, NY, 2013), p. 157.

ⁱⁱ Sara Miles, *Take this Bread: The Spiritual Memoir of a Twenty-First-Century Christian*, (Ballantine Books: New York, NY, 2008), p. 96.