

Reflection

July 21<sup>st</sup> 2024

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

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Title: Three's Company

Prayer: Holy One, bless us in this time of learning and listening for your call to us in our lives. Amen.

My heart is hurting these days. And, I know it's precious for me to say this because I live such a privileged life. But my heart is hurting. It's aching. It's aching for the world. Of course, I can't know this ... but it's like I can feel mother earth's sobs of despair, God's frustrated sigh, the universe's alarm. It feels like there's an increasing amount of anger in the air; and that our only recourse is to pick a side. One side ... and stick to it.

In the Friday message I mused about the dualism of twos. The either/or, black or white, right or wrong scenarios that thinking in twos puts us in. And because I'm thinking about it, of course I see examples of it everywhere – well, not just see examples, but somehow the coat of plaster I layer myself with to live in this world is cracking this week under the awareness of these dualisms.

We have the Democratic or Republican party; Poilievre or Trudeau; Mountain Hwy bridge demonstrators or Keith Rd bypass demonstrators; church youth groups or an online hate groups; Russia or Ukraine; Armed Forces or Pacifists; Israel or Palestine; rich or poor; angry or inquisitive; shut down or gullible.

Good drivers or bad drivers (and of course we are always the good drivers).

When we are given an either/or we must choose one. And, then once we've chosen we're stuck with it. No changing sides.

Do you feel it too? Do you feel like the rhetoric is increasingly moving into either/or decisions and away from exploration, debate, thoughtful reflection, unanswered questions?

There's a lot of anger in the air. Rage even. And we're all guilty of it. Sometimes everything just feels so helpless, so useless – like no matter what we do nothing is going to change anyway. So why do anything?

That sense of helplessness is real. We are inundated with news that we can't really do anything about. I can't stop the war between Russia and Ukraine, can you? I can't singlehandedly make racism disappear, can you? I can't ban hate speech on a global scale.

So, we begin to feel helpless. That helplessness fuels desperation, despair, grief, insecurity, frustration, rage.

And so what do we do? Well, if we can't change anything then we hunker down. We pull up the draw bridge and we don't let anyone in. We protect ourselves and our loved ones. We make sure we have what we need and to heck with anyone else because there's nothing we can do anyway, right? It's too much, too big, too tiring.

Like a friend of mine says ... aha, that's when the evil one has you right where he wants you. Feeling helpless. Feeling like there is absolutely nothing you can do so just give up.

This is partly why my heart is aching ... because it feels like we're close. It feels like we're close to giving up.

The negativity, the hatred, the connivingness, the hunger for power ... it feels these days like it's going to win.

And that makes me sad. That makes me imagine that mother earth is sobbing in despair, God is sighing in frustration and the universe is alarmed.

So .. what do we do?

Enter the notion of three instead of two ... the idea of creating a third space – a space in between the two sides; or a space beyond our own imagining; or an ideal that comes from evolving realities ... or even just more space.

We've been exploring three calls of the church over these last weeks that alone or together have the power, the aspiration, the tools to fuel us in spreading God's message of hope and love; justice and peace. Those calls are:

Deep Spirituality

Bold Discipleship

Daring Justice

In the passage from Mark today Jesus sees how tired his disciples are and wants them to rest. He says "come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Doesn't that sound lovely? Wouldn't you love to hear someone say that to you?

There is a balance to this way, this call of life that Jesus invites us into.

But, as is the case with Jesus, everyone else saw where he was going so they followed; and as is the case with Jesus, his heart felt compassion for them so he continued to teach. The passage says he "began to teach," but I say continued because he's been teaching all along, desperate for the disciples, the crowds, us to have his message land in our hearts.

Is someone hungry? Feed them.

Is someone hurting? Comfort them.

When they land in Genneserat it's back to business – all hands on-deck as they went to villages, cities, farms and marketplaces comforting and healing and teaching.

This passage encapsulates all three calls.

Deep Spirituality can be seen as resting in the arms of God, resting to rejuvenate, resting to grow more connected to the Holy, to the call, to the mission, to the way. It is in moments of silence or calm, moments when we pull ourselves out of the daily routine that we sink deeper into our identity as God's beloved ones.

There is bold discipleship here – the disciples trusted Jesus that they too could go out into the groups of people and spread the love of God, do the work of God and be the

hands and feet of God. And, it is in this kind of bold – trusting – discipleship that we sink deeper into our identity as God’s beloved ones.

They fed 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread. That is some daring justice. Jesus saw people who were like sheep without a shepherd and knew he could do something so he did. Daring justice. It’s in that running into the eye of the storm kind of mindset that we sink deeper into our identity as God’s beloved ones.

I like that Mark doesn’t just say “wherever Jesus went they laid the sick” at his feet; but he identifies the places: the villages, cities, farms, marketplaces.

Episcopal Theologian Elizabeth Webb says “By healing the sick, the weakest and most vulnerable members of a community, in this space {she’s referring to the marketplaces in particular}, Jesus is subverting the economy of this world through the very inauguration of God’s kingdom economy. While the marketplaces of the world belong to the rich and powerful, in the kingdom of God this most political and commercial of spaces is occupied by those with the least. In the age to come, Jesus proclaims, “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Mark 10:31). That age is now breaking into this age; we who seek to live God’s kingdom here and now must follow Jesus’ subversion of worldly power and wealth.”

We need to go deep in our spirituality, bold in our discipleship and daring in our justice.

We must not fall into the indifference of helplessness. We must not let the overwhelm of this age send us running into our homes, pulling up our drawbridges and pretending everything is okay.

And we must not fall into the practice of either / or thinking. Answering the calls of the church to be deep, bold and daring requires us to expand our perspective and our thinking; they require us to see each other, help each other, love each other.

We come to church and receive the loaves and fishes – we receive the word of God and it feeds us. This is what the crowds that beat Jesus to his resting place are looking for – to be fed with living water, to be fed in a way that nourishes not only themselves but mother earth, the community, the universe.

The deeper we take in this message the more bold and daring we can be.

Lutheran theologian David Lose poses some questions based on this passage about finding life abundant. I think his questions work for our three calls as well:

- What do we need as individuals to grow in our spirituality, discipleship and justice seeking?
- What can we contribute in those areas already? And,
- How can the church support us in this growing?

It's not just us who have aching hearts. Everyone does some of the time. The folks we encounter who are closed off are aching just like us. The folks who call us names are aching just like us. The folks who are trying to hoard all they can and gather their loved ones around to try to feel safe are aching just like us.

And, surprise ... sometimes we are "those folks."

The summer choir sang an anthem called "How then shall I live?" It talks about stepping inside someone else's shoes and seeing the world outside of our looking.

Sounds like an expansive third way of approaching each day; sounds like a potential balm for the ache of the world. Sounds like the kingdom of God drawing near.

Amen.