

Sermon July 7/8 2018 Pentecost 7 Proper 9 NOTES expanded for webpage

The Rev. Cheryl Moore

Readings from Advent thru Easter journey of Jesus birth to cross and resurrection. Then in ordinary time go back to the stories of mission and ministry

Through our lectionary readings we have followed Jesus on his journey through the land, collecting followers and disciples, healing people, and working miracles in the lives of strangers and the outcast

Mark story also in Luke and Matthew, story believed to be historical not written to illustrate a theological point

People often say that they wish they had been alive in the time of Jesus, that it would be much easier to believe if they had seen and heard him in person. But, would it have been? Think back to your neighborhood growing up, pick a random kid, that's Jesus...Now I admit there may be some candidates...when I was growing up the 3 year old across the street would clomp around in his mother's heels with a dishcloth over his head and a rosary wrapped around his hands pretending to be a nun. No one was surprised when he became a Franciscan, but none of us would've given him any credibility as a Jesus.

(We today have the experience of the witness and testimony and tradition of the ages to support us in our faith)

And now, Jesus, the miracle worker goes home to bring the gift of the good news to his own people and he is mocked, and scolded and told to keep to his place in the world.

When he is referred to simply as Mary's son, they are likely making unkind remarks about his paternity
When he is referred to as Joseph's son, they are definitely making unkind remarks about his honor, because as an artisan he was dishonorable on two counts, a double-bind

One was expected to live into one's inheritance and it was shameful to do anything to try and improve one's rank. No American boot straps there

And as an artisan it was necessary to leave home and go to other places to seek work, especially for someone who worked in wood, a rare material in those days and times. That meant leaving one's women behind and unprotected in order to provide for them.

And this home that Jesus came to? One of the commentaries on Mark (Megan McKenna) describes Nazareth as a backwater village where perhaps 120 to a 150 people lived, obviously many of them Jesus' extended family - that's a summer weekends worth of people at St. Paul's.

Scholarly commentaries forgo their usual vocabulary and use common phrases like Too big for his britches, who does he think he is, familiarity breeds contempt, (familiarity breeds banality) to describe what was going on when he went home, and many harsher assessments as well

And Jesus....Mark tells us he was offended at his treatment, amazed by it, one would imagine hurt as well, coming home with this wonderful gift to share with them, the good news to tell them, the miracles that were possible and they turned their backs prophets are not without honor he said, except at home

Healings and miracles are by definition a good thing, a welcome event - but even healings and miracles have people that don't welcome them. I think it's the 'be careful what you ask for' syndrome. For miracles as good as they are tend to upset the apple cart. Not just when there are two sides to an issue when there's a winner and a loser, but even when it's all good.

Because when there is change, even good change, someone has to then take responsibility for nurturing and caring for the good into the future. Someone, or several some ones have to be willing to let their lives be turned upside down like the apple cart. And we all know, many people, at times even our selves, choose the lesser option for its comfort and lack of challenge.

But - this is Jesus! Son of the Father, gifted with the Father's knowledge and powers - why on earth can he not do anything here? He is offering us precious spiritual sustenance.

As caregivers most of us have had the experience of new baby learning to eat solid food, welcome and unwelcome...enjoy new experience, different tastes, everything is going well until you try to feed the pureed peas, the lips are clamped and if anything goes in it is sure to come back at you.

As a Hospice chaplain examples of feeding in hospice sustenance necessary for life welcome and unwelcome but when the decision is made to not take it in, its lethal

Juan, Puerto Rican, elderly, blind, mostly but not entirely deaf, spoke no English, bed ridden, nurses found Puerto Rican music and played it often at his bedside. Woken for meals, and when the spoon touched his mouth he opened, and ate and savoured taking in the sustenance necessary to physical life, and whatever mental and emotional life he still had.

Nancy, well off, full life, while she had a terminal diagnosis she also had every resource to be cared for, for a long time. She said she was ready to go and meet her maker. So she fed and nourished her spiritual life by denying herself the sustenance needed for her body to continue on. She was ready and made the decision to stop eating, and she shed her physical being not many days later.

We have heard Jesus say, your faith has made you whole to people. But that didn't mean that they could make themselves whole as long as they could conjure up the right recipe for faith. It did mean they had to be open to the unknown, to the change, the transformation that faith might bring with it. They had to be open to Jesus working in their hearts, and their minds and their lives. He could not force faith upon them.

Barbara Brown Taylor likened Jesus trying to heal in Nazareth to one of us with a match trying to light wet wood ablaze. The power is there, the heat to start the flames, but there was no spot for the flame to take hold.

So, Jesus moves on to other villages, where there are people willing to receive him, and he begins to send his apostles out two by two to extend this gift over and over till it was heard throughout the land and down through the ages. Till today. With the weight of history and tradition and the experience of many before us.

Faith in this way is not a static belief system but a deep and mutual relationship, something the Nazarenes were too proud or skeptical to embrace.

Ultimately, today's gospel asks us how faithful we are to Jesus' transforming power in our own lives, in the daily routine of choices and challenges. Because miracles and healings aren't always front page headlines in the newspaper or the top story on the evening news.

People today talk about miracles loosely, finding the 12 boys in the cave was considered a miracle by some. But now comes the very hard work of fulfilling the promise of that with an actual rescue.

Those of you who were at Drew's ordination may remember the Bishop talking about taking a deep breath and speaking up in the locker room at the Y when someone was using inappropriate language in an unpleasant manner. (relate the story) It was an uncomfortable thing for him to do, it doesn't get any easier just because you might happen to be a Bishop. He dared to let his heart be open and take the risk.

When Meg was in kindergarten a group of girls at her dance recital were pulling their eyes aslant and talking in sing song voices making fun of Asian peoples. She spoke up and told them off, not easy for a 5 year old to go against the crowd. Why? If her friends (Seung Hee, leuan, etc.) had heard they would be hurt and she loved them. Her heart was open and she took the risk.

Now, many places you may think it might be better not to say something. Thanksgiving dinner, or a business meeting, is not a time to get in a big fight over politics, or other inflammatory issues, but it is still a time when someone who is inappropriate really needs to be called out for using language or making accusations. Even if it's just a quiet, let's not go there now, or some other remark. Take the risk, sometimes you are the only one that can. Don't expect the only woman to defend herself, the only person of color, the disabled, the outsider of any kind

When you are in that place, speak up for the other. Let your heart be the place that Jesus light can shine through into the hurt and start the healing.

And remember while sometimes it's simple these can be real risks not just to your comfort or social standing, the two men who died in Oregon last year defending the person on the train experienced that.

I can think of many times when I have done something like that, but regret the many more times when I didn't want to make more of a scene, or just wished it would go away, or wasn't sure what would be best, so I did nothing. When I didn't let Jesus love and strength support me through the moment.

Not everyone is cut out to take leadership in a public and active way to bring the promise of the Gospel into the community but everyone has the ability to open their mouth whether it's to eat the peas which are good for your body, or stick up for the outcast, which is good for your soul.

In Hindu the gesture and the bow of folded hands, Namaste, means I bow to the god in you. To keep our hearts and minds open to the transformative power of Jesus lives every day means constantly reminding ourselves each and every day to hold each person we meet and each choice and challenge we face by seeing Jesus' promise and love in them