Called to Care – Living Wholeness

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 Kimby Young

Psalm 13 September 11, 2016

I used to think of the Psalms as peaceful pleasant ways of praising God. “The Lord is my Shepherd.” “Make a joyful noise to the Lord.” “Let everything that breathes praise God.” But then in seminary I took a course on the Psalms and began reading the less popular Psalms. There are ways of categorizing those Psalms – as praise or thanksgiving or royal songs … or Psalms of lament. Psalm 13 – the Psalm read today – is the most familiar Psalm of lament. A lament is a complaint to God. “How long O Lord?” Of the 150 Psalms, fully two thirds are laments. One hundred of the hundred and fifty Psalms are complaints to God – not praise, not sweet songs about contentment and joy – but complaints full of fear and anger and doubt and concern and struggle and suffering. What does that tell you? Seriously, think about it. What can we learn from the Psalms of lament? It tells me a few things – first, God can take it. We don’t need to be careful around God. We need to tell God like it is – what we are really feeling. We can even yell at God, cry to God, scream in prayer for God’s help. God will listen. And in the Psalms of lament there is an expectation that God will respond. Second, it tells me that people haven’t changed a lot in 3000 years. People still complain and worry and stress and struggle two thirds of the time more than we praise and rest in God’s grace. It is our nature to see the difficulties, to recognize the challenges, to yearn for everything to be better, to struggle against one another and ourselves, to be angry and afraid and hurting. Lament is who we are. God knows that and loves us anyway. And third, the Psalms of lament tell me God has answers. God has solutions and can help us. Because in many of the laments God does turn it around. God can bring healing and wholeness and strength and redemption and restoration. Not that it will be easy – but peace is promised.

Today, we mark an anniversary – 15 years ago the world was rocked by terrorism – and in many ways the world was changed forever on that day. It was not the first time hatred was so visible, but it was a day that still rattles in our memories. Today we remember lives lost. Today we revisit images and experiences of terror. Today we share stories and moments. Today we honor heroes who ran in to help others, and we are grateful. Today we recognize what has been rebuilt from the ashes, and what new life is possible still. Today we cherish loved ones and we lift up ideals of patriotism and selflessness and care.

In the world around us we recognize problems – fear and anger, separation and injustice, nastiness in politics and bullying at school, and whatever you have to deal with in your daily life. We know there is a lot to work on, there is a lot to worry about, there is a lot to lament.

Even in this congregation, we have made mistakes, we have hurt feelings, we have wounded one another. Our call today is to recognize these very real deep dark issues in our lives – to recognize the pain and suffering and struggle – and to lament. To lift our concerns to God and to ask God for transformation and renewal. To forgive those who have wronged us and to ask forgiveness where needed. To ask God to heal the wounds and help us to move forward. To expect God to make things right as God has promised again and again.

Now some of you are thinking “That’s rather demanding. Let’s hope Kimby doesn’t get struck by lightning.” And yes, it is demanding. But God is okay with that. God tells us ask and you shall receive. God tells us to lift up our worries and woes. God tells us to offer our burdens into God’s care. But God doesn’t say that’s all we have to do. God expects us to do our part as well. Transformation is not easy. It takes commitment. It takes work. It takes persistence. God offers us solutions. God offers us forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, wholeness, peace. But God calls us to do our part. God calls us to responsibility. God calls us to follow Jesus in order to bring about the transformation Christ has promised.

The scripture for today from Corinthians reminds us that we are Christ’s disciples wherever we go. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation which Jesus started. God has made us ambassadors for Christ. That means we work for Christ here and now – we continue the work of Christ – bringing people together, bringing people to God, showing people the way and sharing God’s love. The scripture says we no longer see anyone from a human point of view. We see everyone as God sees them. Really? The bully on the school yard, the terrorist in the city, the corrupt politician, the person who hurt you deeply – we see all these people as God sees them. And we work for reconciliation. That is a challenge. Can’t I just go back to lamenting and complaining? Sorry, no. It is our job to make things right in the world. We are Christ’s ambassadors bringing wholeness, healing, forgiveness, peace, hope to the world. That is our call.

So, how? How are we to answer this call to reconciliation? How are we to heal? Simply – one step at a time, one day at a time, one problem at a time. In the last few minutes of the sermon, I want you to identify one area in your life that needs work – one piece that you can tackle this week. Reach into the darkness and name one fear, one worry, one source of anger, one stab of pain, one place of suffering – and offer that up to God. Maybe it is a relationship – someone you have wronged, someone who has wronged you. Maybe it is a world issue – like racism or terrorism or hunger or war. Maybe it is an illness or a stress or a person who needs help. Identify one need for healing and lift that to God. It may take longer than this minute here and now. It probably will take longer to resolve, but let’s start now. As with the lament from Psalm 13 honestly place your concern before God and ask for God’s intervention. Imagine placing that concern in your hand and lifting it to God. The Psalm says “Give light to my eyes.” Ask God to inspire you to action – to tell you what to do to set things right. Healing may come instantly in a flood of relief, or it may come slowly step by step over a long long time. It might require extending an apology, making amends or letting go of resentment. It might require getting involved in the community in some way or finding out about a situation in the world where you can help. Your call from God might require big changes in your life, or just little shifts in perspective – looking at other people from God’s point of view – seeing God in those around you. Your call from God might be something you can do alone, or it might require getting others involved in your church family. I don’t know how God will call you. I don’t know what God will ask. But I believe God calls. Listen for God’s word for you.

And notice the last two verses of Psalm 13. “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for God has been good to me.” That’s how the lament ends – with praise for God’s love and goodness. May it be so for you as well. May you receive God’s healing grace this day. May you know God’s presence and power. And whatever challenge you face, may you know with complete certainty that God holds you by the hand and walks with you into perfect peace.