

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Communion Meditation: A Table for Our Healing

Focus: God himself will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes; death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.—Revelation 21:3-4

First Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 49:13-15

Second Scripture Lesson: Matthew 11: 28-30; Revelation 21:1-5

But anyone who loves God needs no tears, no admiration; he forgets the suffering in the love. Indeed, so completely has he forgotten it that there would not be the slightest trace of his suffering left if God himself did not remember it, for he sees in secret and recognizes distress and counts the tears and forgets nothing.—Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

First Scripture Lesson

A newsfeed is like a firehose—there’s no way you can take it all in. But every once in a while, a story, an image, comes along that catches your attention. Last week, for me, it was one about the flooding in southeastern Kentucky, and a woman, a mother, named Jessica Willett.

About 11:30 at night, Jessica Willett heard water rushing outside the door of her manufactured home. When she opened it, she saw that the water was rushing all around her home, her car had already been swept away, and that there was no way she and her two children—ages 11 and 3—could make it out to higher ground. They were trapped. And soon after that, she could hear—she could feel—the floodwaters lifting her home from its foundations.

So what did she do? She cut off the cord from the vacuum cleaner, and used it to tie the three of them together. She told her kids to “kick as hard as you can” if they wound up in the water. “If they find us,” she thought to herself, “they’ll find us together.”

In the Bible, the predominant form of argument, the favorite way of making a point rhetorically, is through an “how much more” argument, in Latin (if you want to impress your friends) it’s called, *a fortiori*. If “X,” then how much more “Y.” Jesus uses it all the time:

“Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?” they ask him. And he answers:

“Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? If a sheep is that valuable, **How much more** valuable is a human being! So it **is** lawful to do good on the sabbath.”

How much more? Infinitely more.

And it's in the Old Testament, too. If a mother loves her children that much—enough to tie herself to them with a vacuum cord in the midst of a flood—then how much more must God love each of us?

Here's the setting: The prophet Isaiah has good news: God has heard their cries! The exiles—that large number of Israelites who had been carted off to Babylon after the Babylonians conquered and razed Jerusalem—the exiles are at last going home! So Isaiah Chapter 49, verse 13:

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

But the exiles can't believe it: it's been too long: 50, 60 going on nearly 70 years now. And so their cry of dereliction, of being forsaken. Verse 14:

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me."

But God answers that cry with a how-much-more argument:
Verse 15:

Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.

How much more does God love each of us? Infinitely more.

Second Scripture Lesson

An invitation and a promise:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

A *remarkable* invitation and an even more remarkable promise. Not least of all because it comes out of the blue, out of nowhere, in fact it seems to stand in direct contradiction to everything that's going on with Jesus at the time.

All around him there is unrest: uncertainty and confusion; resistance, conflict, impending chaos; turmoil, danger and the threat of violence.

Just listen to a few of the things Jesus says right before and right after he offers that invitation and makes that promise:

“Whoever is not with me is against me . . . Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. . . . whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. . . They will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings. And blessed are they who take no offense at me.”

And speaking of taking offense, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of desecrating the Sabbath, Jesus responds in a way that occasions them to take even greater offense. He says:

“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here [and by that he means himself]. . . For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

Uncertainty and confusion, resistance, conflict, and impending chaos, turmoil, danger and the threat of violence—it’s all unrest. And yet in the midst of all that, Jesus offers this remarkable invitation and makes this even more remarkable promise.

How can he do it?

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Sermon: A Table for Our Healing

[At the communion table] “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens . . . “

“People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God . . .”

[the bread] “Take eat, this is my body broken for you.

A remarkable invitation.

“And I will give you rest . . . learn from me; and you will find rest for your souls”

[the cup] This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins.

An even more remarkable promise.

How can he do it—how can he offer that invitation, make that promise, in the midst of all his—and all our—unrest?

He can do it because he is who he is, and he will do what he will do, and he will suffer what he will suffer.

“For God so loved the world . . .

And Jesus said his disciples: “The Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

“For God so loved the world . . .”

And so here, at this table, our healing begins, because here at this table God gives himself, gives his only Son, to us: [hands on bread]this is my body, [hands on cup] this is my blood—for our healing and for the healing of our world. [the elements] Tikkun Olam—for the healing of the world. Love heals.

We are—each of us—capable of, made for, full of, beauty, goodness and joy. And so also, is our world. Anyone with eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to think, and a heart to feel and to yearn, knows that. (But how often do we fail to use those?).

But we also know that something has gone wrong, terribly wrong—both with us and our world. Things are—we are—not the way we were meant to be.

And so that goodness, that beauty, that joy, seems beyond us. Oh, on occasion, for a moment, and sometimes even longer, we see them, we experience them in ourselves, in others and in the world—and so we have rest—for a time. But it never seems to last, it always seems to be at risk; it never seems to be truly, fully, forever ours.

And too often everything in us and our world seems to be unrest: uncertainty and confusion; resistance, conflict, impending chaos; turmoil, danger and the threat of violence seem to rule.

Again, anyone with eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to think, and a heart to feel and to yearn knows this. (But how often do we fail to use those?)

And so we and our world need healing—healing, to become what we were meant to be and truly are—that is, God’s. And here at this table our healing begins. It’s not for nothing that our Lord is called, “The Great Physician.”

But healing, as anyone who has ever suffered any kind of illness or injury knows, is a process—it takes time. And not only time, but effort—including our own effort. Yes,

you're called a patient, which literally means one who suffers, but healing is by no means a passive process.

Anyone who has ever suffered through physical therapy knows this: "That really hurts and *now* you're telling me I have to do *this* at home, *two* times a day *every* day?!?—are you kidding me?!?"

(Physical therapists, it's not that we don't love you, and you're doing the Lord's work, it's just that, well, it hurts, and your sunny disposition and can-do attitude can be, well . . . a little exasperating at times.)

Come to me all you who weary and are carrying heavy burdens . . . and I will give you rest.

And if healing is always a process that requires time and our effort—true healing, ultimate healing, the healing that makes us and our world truly and fully God's, is a ***lifelong*** process: we are all always recovering sinners.

But progress—movement towards health and reality—is both possible and real. Again, anyone who has ever been sick knows this: there comes a point when you know you're getting better and you're going to get better: the pain lessens, you can taste food again, it's still fragile but there's hope: this world and this life don't seem so bad after all; there's light.

Love reaches down and hope arises. That's what being healed is like.

And so our ***healing*** begins at *this* table, but also ***ends*** at this table—or rather ends at the heavenly table that this table represents. And it is at that heavenly table—*that* table in the Kingdom of God—where we are once and for all made whole:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, See, I am making all things new."

So to see all things being made new, I would like you to do me a favor: when you partake of communion in a few minutes, take a moment, shut your eyes and think of someone dear to you—someone you love—who is no longer with us in this world. And remember that even when the flood waters were rising around that person, and the foundations were washing away, God was there. Like a mother tying herself to her

children with a vacuum cleaner cord, God was there: “kick as hard as you can”. “If they find us, they’ll find us together.”

If those two children were that beloved to their mother, how much more beloved is each of us to God? Infinitely more.

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.*

And so think of that person, the one you love so much, made fully whole and fully healed, in the arms of a loving God: as who and what she really is: a child of God, with all the beauty, goodness and joy of that person that you loved so much shimmering and resplendent in perfection. Think of that when you take communion. “ See I am making all things new.”

And know this: in the arms of that loving God, all the suffering, all the pain is forgotten—like a dream that dies at the opening of day, it is all forgotten.

By us, that is, but not by God:

But anyone who loves God needs no tears, no admiration; he forgets the suffering in the love. Indeed, so completely has he forgotten it that there would not be the slightest trace of his suffering left if God himself did not remember it, for he sees in secret and recognizes distress and counts the tears and forgets nothing.

If our love for God is such that we will forget all our suffering and pain in the love of God, how much more is God’s love for us that God will not forget.

How much more? Infinitely more.

Love heals [communion elements]—us and our world.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.