



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 5
Proper 8 (B)
June 27, 2021

RCL: 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

David models for us how to express grief as a community. Israel had lost its king and David had lost Jonathan, the man he loved. It was a time for public grief, for weeping (v. 24). David delivered a beautiful poem that names the hurts and expresses the sense of loss that had descended upon his people. (The compilers note that this eulogy was preserved in the book of Jashar, a now-lost collection that celebrated the heroic deeds of the Israelites.) David revealed his wisdom as a man and a leader – he intuitively felt that his nation cannot move forward until it has sufficiently grieved this loss. His people are heartbroken, but the journey of grieving together will make them strong at the broken places.

The Franciscan spiritual writer Richard Rohr teaches, “Pain that is not transformed will be transmitted.” When suppressed, emotional and spiritual wounds will bleed out in destructive ways. Intentional, communal grief work, however, creates a container wherein we face collective pain, and together cooperate with God’s transforming grace. While harrowing, communal grieving is a pathway to healing. This will be especially important as we emerge from the experience of Covid-19, continue to grapple with the unhealed wounds from violence perpetrated against our African American sisters and brothers, and face the unresolved divisions that have persisted among us since the Civil War. David teaches us from across the centuries how to approach the indispensable spiritual task of grieving.

- What might we need to grieve, personally and collectively, so that we can journey toward healing?
- What can David’s poetry teach us about grieving?

Psalm 130

I once had a conversation with my spiritual director about what it means for God to be “all-powerful.” In the face of so much injustice and suffering in the world, it is hard to believe in an all-powerful God, I said. My director responded that God is all-powerful *in love and mercy*. These simple but incisive thoughts might help orient us as we reflect on Psalm 130.

The psalmist begins with a cry from “the depths” (*ma‘amaqqim* in Hebrew, *de profundis* in Latin.) The term connotes chaos, destruction, devastation, and death. Finding God in such circumstances speaks to a great

spiritual theme of our tradition – God is found in the brokenness of life, symbolized in a man nailed to a cross. A testament to the mercy and goodness of God is that such times that we see as a total failure and dead-end, God can use toward our transformation. As the late Leonard Cohen sang, “There is a crack in everything. That’s where the light gets in.” As is the case with many of us, this psalmist found God when he/she hit rock bottom!

Our verses also model for us an honest confrontation with sinfulness, with failings. The first step on the journey of transformation is an honest self-assessment. It is a part of human experience that we will fail; we will hurt others; we will do wrong. A true mark of a spiritually maturing person is an ability to humbly acknowledge our sins before God, ask for forgiveness, and atone, if possible. Related to this is the acknowledgment that we can’t do this alone. As our psalmist says, *with the Lord* is “mercy... and plenteous redemption.”

- How have you experienced God’s all-powerfulness in love and mercy?

2 Corinthians 8:7,9, 13-15

The context of our reading from 2 Corinthians is Paul’s appeal for the collection he is taking up for the mother church in Jerusalem. This was a significant concern for him, as he had a fractious relationship with the leadership of that church. Despite their differences, Paul wanted to show solidarity with them.

Paul’s appeal is straightforward and reads like a good fundraising letter! He admires the Corinthians’ excellence in other areas; surely they will excel in giving as well. Then he appeals to the example of Jesus - he gave most generously for them and it is time to pay it forward. Finally, Paul finds a parallel from Israel’s past – Exodus 16:18 – which he uses as a maxim, “Those who gathered much had nothing over...”

We can interpret Paul’s words as a call to reciprocity and care. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul made it clear that the church had been made rich because God chose to share all things with them (1 Cor 3:21-23). This is a larger theme of the First Testament – “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1). This is a powerful critique our world needs to hear – this world that seems to be obsessed with “what is mine,” whether wealth, possessions, land, food, water, resources, etc. None of it is “mine” – it’s all for the common good.

- How do you interpret Paul’s admonition for those with abundance to share so that there may be equality?

Mark 5:21-43

Ministry often happens in the interruptions! We might have our plans and agendas, but life will interrupt, calling us to put those aside. The most meaningful, impactful moments come as interruptions, surprises, unexpected moments that become doorways of empathy and grace.

The author of Mark's Gospel uses a technique here called *intercalation* – the use of one passage to interpret another. Notice how skillfully Mark has woven together the story of the daughter of Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage. Both are “daughters”, both seek assistance, they are at opposite and parallel ends of the economic hierarchy, one woman is old, the other young, and the 12-year-old daughter was born when the woman's hemorrhage began.

The bleeding woman is healed on two levels. First, her physical ailment is cured. Second, she is restored to right relationship with the community. Her issue of blood would have made her unclean and separated her from others. Jesus calls her “daughter”, signifying that her connection to the community has been restored. African American commentators have noted the boldness of the woman in approaching Jesus and how female leaders of the Black community have often been compelled to act bravely in efforts to bring about change. For example, Phillis Wheatley wrote poetry that captured the attention of Thomas Jefferson and other White men of influence; Sojourner Truth challenged male-only suffrage among Black people; Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. Like the woman with the hemorrhage, they all boldly broke major social barriers in their work of bringing wholeness and transformation.

- Where have you experienced grace in moments of “interruption”?

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