

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, April 3, 2022

John 19:28-30

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Beloved, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever.
Amen.

I'm thirstier this morning than I am on most mornings. It didn't strike me till I was reading that passage. We navigate our grief. Sometimes we get thirsty.

We began with denial, this idea that there are some losses, some deaths, some things, that we don't even want to recognize as a reality. We cannot let our minds and our hearts go to a place of acknowledging them.

Now we come to acceptance. What does that look like, then? Well, it means, to one extent or another, we've at least recognized that we are indeed navigating grief.

Jesus is nailed to a cross.
“

Scripture from the gospel of Matthew says that “about noon the sky grew dark for about three hours until three in the afternoon.” The gospels give us different depictions of what happened right around then; a curtain was torn great, clamoring took place. What we know from the gospel of John is this - that he found himself thirsty hanging there and he asked for some something to drink. There was some sour wine there right by the crosses, and somebody was gracious enough, even in his pain, to find a sponge, to fill it with that wine, and raise it to his lips.

Then Jesus does this. He names the loss. He accepts it. He says for all to hear, “It is finished.” He does not just name the loss. He does something else. He bows his head, and the gospel writer tells us that he gave up his spirit.

That's the important part for us. We'll spend plenty of time on holy week with the passion and the cross and the death,

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but there's something here in this scene that we have to recognize. Jesus's spirit was not taken from him, but He gave it.

He fell into the reality that He already knew was coming, the one that He had asked to have removed from him if possible. "If it is your will remove this cup from me. Not my will, but Yours, Lord" He says in the garden.

The reality that He has proclaimed numerous times leading up to is that He must die, and then three days later be raised.

Richard Rohr has this beautiful description of what the divine looks like. It's a circular dance. He says "For us to experience fully faith in God, we must fall into that. We cannot stand on the sidelines and watch the divine at work in the world. To actually be people of faith, we must fall into the flow of the divine."

When I hear Jesus speak these words, "It is finished", and then I watch as he bows his head and then He willingly gives up his spirit, I see him falling back into the flow of all creation. The flow of God. It's one thing to see Jesus do it, but it's another thing entirely to live into it ourselves.

Each of these stages has different difficulty to accompany it,

but when we move into a space of acceptance, we must not imagine that this means that there will be a relief to the pain.

Acceptance is painful.

You know, the peculiar and terrible thing about people who have died that we might be grieving, is that they stay dead.

They don't come back to life on anniversaries or on birthdays; they don't show up at parent-teacher conferences or performances; they stay dead. Our losses, broken relationships, and friendships, they stay broken. They don't miraculously come back to life. It's the terrible truth of loss and death. There's a finality to it.

In this stage we are called upon to move to a place, not of approval of death and loss, but of acceptance. What I might posit to you this day is that, as we accept loss and as we move into this stage of acceptance, something peculiar and beautiful happens. We make a way for wisdom and healing. So long as we don't allow ourselves to go to a place where we might state aloud that it is finished and then willingly give up that spirit. So long as we resist that we ought not be surprised when we don't experience healing.

Perhaps you've been to an AA meeting before or an Al-Anon meeting, or some anonymous meeting, or perhaps you just are familiar with the serenity prayer. "God, grant me this serenity

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to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

It's an abbreviated part of a much longer prayer. If you Google it, it might not be attributed to anyone,

but for those who are people of faith we actually know that it comes from a theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, it's a reappropriating of a different prayer. I think it's important for us this day because “God grant me the serenity to accept the things i cannot change” is pretty quick, but acceptance is more complicated than that. Niebuhr actually wrote this prayer, “God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking as Jesus did the sinful world as it is, not as i would have it. Trusting that you will make all things right, if I surrender to your will, so that i may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next.” It is one thing for us to see Jesus accept the fate that was his. It is another thing altogether for us to accept our own.

In preparation for worship this day, I read a quote from C.S. Lewis. He's speaking of the loss of his beloved. There was an ellipses in there because we cut out a couple sentences.

“Something quite unexpected has happened,” Lewis says. “It came this morning early for various reasons, not in themselves all mysterious. My heart was lighter than it had been for many weeks. For one thing I suppose I am recovering physically from a good deal of mere exhaustion, and I had a very tiring but very healthy 12 hours of sleep the day before.

But after 10 days of low hung gray skies and motionless warm dampness, the sun was shining, and there was a light breeze this morning, and suddenly, at the very moment, when so far i mourned her least. I remembered her best.” Lewis puts into words what is hard for us to come to terms with, As we move into the stage of acceptance, we make way for wisdom and healing and newness.

Beloved, the good news of acceptance is this as we accept our loss, we become fellow travelers with Jesus the Christ. We fall, as Jesus did, into the divine dance of the Living God. That is to say that we fall into the compassionate love of all the universe.

As we fall into this love, as we come to grips with its reality, as we freely give our spirit to it, the love of God finds us and holds us safe and dear.

That is not to say that it is easy.

There will still be pain. There will still be sadness. There will still be much to navigate together, but it is to say that it is in the love of God that we might find peace, that we might find healing, that we might find hope.

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That's my hope for each of us this day and for our church. We started this series with the subtitle 'Navigating Lost Together'. For five Sundays, you have gathered in this place. You have brought with you the losses that you carry this day, you have brought your anger, your frustration, your bargaining, your denial; you brought them all with you to this place.

The hope of faith is that you might bring them here and be assured that the God of all creation meets you wherever you are in your grief. As we accept that reality, we are undergirded by the love which was with Christ on the cross and the love into which he freely gave his spirit. My hope for you is that whatever grief you are navigating this day, you might be open to giving your spirit to it and trusting that God meets you there. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.