

## **Sermon for Sunday August 29, 2021**

### **In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer:**

“Arise my love, and come away with me.”

“You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

Imagine this. God calls to us each day. Tells us we are God’s Beloved. God then invites us to come away into the day from sunrise to sunset to spend the whole day, together. God comes to us in the sweet soft light of the sun’s rise. God is there as the morning light spreads across the trees, the water, the land; illuminating and brightening everything it touches, giving color, shape, and form to all that was shadowed in the dark of night. God invites us to open our eyes, our ears, our minds, our hearts, our bodies to all that the day will bring us. In the process God asks us to love as we are loved. We are to see the world around us, people, everything before us as God’s Beloved, just as we are God’s Beloved. God’s love song greets us and carries us through whatever the day will bring, until we say goodnight to the day and hello to the evening stars and moon, until we close our eyes and nestle into sleep still embraced in the love which called forth the morning, the same love which called each of us in the beginning to life. A lovely dream – perhaps, a possibility -yes!

James tells us in today’s Epistle that we were given birth by the word of truth to be God’s best fruits. James then warns us to rid ourselves of those things which pull us away from living into the fullness of who we are to be. He reminds us we are to be doers of the word. James speaks about all that can happen in the day light, all the pushes and pulls, the temptations, frenzies of emotion, fears and guilts that fill us and draw us away from any awareness of our beloved-ness.

Today’s reading from Mark takes us further into what can drive us from what we are called to be and do. Jesus calls the scribes hypocrites, as they try to make people live into their strict purity laws. Purity laws which are actually human traditions which took the law to places where the original intent was lost and overshadowed by human interpretations. He uses Isaiah’s words “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” The scribes said eating without washing hands defiles the food we are eating. Jesus turns this around. He tells them they have abandoned the commandment to love one another as God loves us. Jesus

tells them it is not about what goes into us that defiles us. It is what lives within us. It is within our human hearts where we go wrong. Looking at the list Joe just read in the gospel, we can deny they have anything to do with us, or we can look at the list beginning with fornication and ending with folly, we can look at and reflect on the things which separate us from God and wonder what it is within us that drives us away from God.

When we look at scripture each week, we take deep dives into what they might be saying to us. If we step back and look at them as part of the whole sweep of scripture, look them as a long, on-going story/ history of God's relationship with creation, with humanity, with us as a community and as individuals. we can see an ongoing invitation to come away and be loved. We can also see the ongoing waiting and reaching out towards us on God's part, as we humans stray, come back, and stray again. Birth, life, death, and resurrection, we are always caught, carried, and embraced in the ever-present love of God. Still, we hurt one another, we hurt ourselves. We make mistakes, we make bad choices. We want more than we need. We are fearful, we act out of fear. We get angry. We want to be in control. We hoard our food, our possessions. We refuse to share what we have. We lose sight of who we are, we lose sight of who we are meant to be.

Jesus' strong words paired with those from the Song of Songs can seem brilliant and insightful, they can also make us scratch our heads and wonder what those who put the lectionary together were about. There is a hint, I believe, in the collect. "Graft in our hearts the love of your name, . . . , nourish us with all goodness, and bring forth in us the fruit of good works."

So. what goodness lives within me? Within us? What work of good fruits for God do I do? Do we do?

Today we step into our season of stewardship for this year. We ask ourselves what it means for us in our lives and here in our parish community. Stewardship begins in our hearts with gratitude. The Dali Lama says, "I am fortunate to be alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it." Brother David Steindl-Rast tells us "It is gratefulness that makes us happy. Every moment is a gift. The gift within the gift is the opportunity it offers us." Being grateful, feeling gratitude opens the door to compassion and the willingness to be there with others

in their suffering. Compassion leads to generosity. All of them are bound up in love. God's love shared with us and one another.

Douglas Abrams in the Book of Joy tells us Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychology professor at the University of California says that gratitude is a factor that seems to influence happiness. She says a final factor to happiness is our ability to be kind and generous toward others. The Dali Lama and Bishop Tutu say gratitude is related to compassion and generosity. Abrams goes on, "When we recognize all we have been given, it is our natural response to want to care for and give to others." For us as Christians we believe that all we have comes from God. God's very first gift to us beyond life is love.

This past week, while watching the weather channel as I was following along with what was happening with the storm Henri, I watched an interview with a 96 year, old man, I will call him Mr. Jones, in Tennessee who has been caught in the devastating floods there. He was standing outside the remains of his home which was an old, very long, mobile home. He shared his harrowing story about standing in his home with his dogs as the water rose. He said when it got high on his chest, he thought to himself well this is the day I am going to die. He said he resigned himself to God. Then, just as suddenly and as fast as the waters rose, they began to fall until they were gone, and he was rescued. All he could do at that point was thank God. He guessed that he still had something to do. And I would say part of that something he had to do was to share his story and his faith with those willing to listen. I see the photos of the people in Haiti caught in the aftermath of an earthquake and then hurricane and the complete devastation there and the crowds of desperate people trying to flee Afghanistan, and I wonder what stories do they have to share? How will they touch us?

Sharing our stories, relating those stories to God's story can bring us moments of gratitude. We are called to be stewards of God's creation, we to be God's Care-Takers. Stopping ourselves in the busyness of living and reflecting on our lives, taking the time each day at the end of the day to name those things we are grateful for, is the beginning of understanding what it means to be God's Beloved. God's abundance can be seen, known, experienced every day when we take the time. Even those days when it seems everything has gone wrong as it had for Mr. Jones, we can find something to be grateful for. If nothing else, as he was,

we can be grateful to be alive at the end of the day. When we get in touch with that deep heart knowledge that we are here and alive because God created us we can get in touch with gratitude. When we get in touch with knowing that we have been given our talents and skills which can be used to care for our own needs and those of others, then we know that we are rich. We are rich! Richer than we will ever know, if not with goods and money we are rich in the love offered, rich in the love we can share.

Stewardship is about paying attention. As you take the time to think about your stewardship, what are you grateful for? It is out of grateful hearts that we give. It is out of grateful hearts that we become caring care takers of God's creation.