August 20, 2017

11 Pentecost

|  |
| --- |
| [Isaiah 56:1,6-8](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp15_RCL.html#ot2) [Psalm 67](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp15_RCL.html#ps2) [Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp15_RCL.html#nt1) [Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp15_RCL.html#gsp1) |

Let’s begin as I always like to begin with a deep breath that we hold for a moment as we allow our hearts to calm and our thoughts to settle, letting go of what was happening earlier and what might happen later. Another deep breath, hold, breath out, relaxing, as we all say….

Amen.

Have a seat. Good morning.

“It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles….” Matthew 15:11

I don’t know about you, but I feel like I am drowning in words.

Words, words, words. (I struggled with this sermon – it just felt like more words. I was still trying to put some thoughts together yesterday afternoon.)

Our 24/7 news cycle, 140 character tweets, Google syndrome, Rachael Maddow, Anderson Cooper, sound bites, texts, Facebook….. words and more words.

I really don’t want to inundate you with more words, more rhetoric.

Let’s take a breath. (A few moments of silence)

My heart is heavy with sorrow. I can barely breath for all the hateful, angry, painful, sorrowful words in the air, flying around and over and into my very being. I am very empathic, I feel what is happening on the greater stage of the world, on the smaller stage of my family, in my body. My stomach hurts and when I eat, the food feels like a lump in my middle. My chest feels tight and constricted at times. My eyes fill with tears and my head aches and I pray, “Lord, help me.”

Breathe (A few moments of silence)

“…what comes out of your mouth defiles you.”

I tend to be an optimist, a cock-eyed optimist, always looking for what’s good, in people, in situations. Hope is my favorite word – hope for humanity, hope for you, hope for me. I believe people are basically good. I believe people get up in the morning and do their best to care for their families, their loved ones, themselves. Maybe that is Pollyanna, but I know, in my own life, that I’m just trying to do - my best with what I know today.

Of course, then I read about violence in Charlottesville, about a young woman’s life cut short in a quick moment, a moment of pure hate and anger. I shake my head because I just don’t understand. More words get thrown – in both directions.

(Brief Silence)

“I hate you because you’re are black, brown, young, old, crippled, pregnant, gay, lesbian, mixed, trans, tall, fat, short, green eyed, ginger-haired, blue eyed, … I hate you because you are NOT LIKE ME.”

“I hate you because you hate them, because you want to hurt them, because you are narrow-minded, because you are hateful.”

“I hate you because you carry a big gun, a gun I know can kill the entire crowd in a few short moments. I hate you because you love those guns, because those guns mean more to you than people do, than I do.”

“I hate you because you don’t worship my God, you don’t say my prayers, you don’t believe exactly as I believe, and I hate you because I think you will take my God away from me.”

(Brief silence)

“Lord, help me!”

Quantum physics tells us that we are all connected – scientific fact – that as we observe events, things, people, we change them. Our observance changes them. Our observance, our looking. Quantum physics also tells us that as one aspect of the whole changes, the entire whole changes, with it. Think about that. We can create change simply by observing and changing ourselves, as part of the whole.

Ghandi told us “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Mother Teresa told us “Peace begins with a smile.” “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

(Brief silence)

When I see hate in another, I see my own hate.

When I see Love in another, I see my own love.

When I see fear in another, I see my own fear.

It is the same for you.

If we truly are one, and this has been shown to be so, then what we see in another is a reflection of our own – short-coming, our own gifts, our own talents, our own faults, our own sorrows.

(Brief Silence)

The first part of today’s Gospel is so relevant for today, isn’t it? We can feel, see, hear, and taste how words defile us, defile not just the person, but the system, all of humanity. This is our lived experience – right now.

Then there is this amazing Canaanite woman, a Gentile, a Greek, an outsider. To the Jews, she is a pagan, a foreigner, outside the covenant. For this, she is despised. Sound familiar? In today’s terms, she is immigrant, Muslim, lesbian, black, speaking broken English, a foreigner. Yet, she is persistent, unrelenting, willing to endure humiliation on behalf of her suffering child. What’s wrong with her child? Demons? Illness? Does it matter? This woman is there on our behalf, for women, for men, for children, for her child, for our children, because we have all been outsiders, we have all been ill, we have all defiled.

Her words are the high point of the story. This makes this story unique. She challenges the status quo. The disciples are disturbed. Jesus appears disturbed. He has the parameters of this mission and it is for the House of Israel, not her, not her daughter, not her people. Again, sound familiar? We get a chance through this Gospel to learn exactly how far the mission of Jesus extends. Even Jesus seems to be surprised. Even after his harsh words, calling her a dog, she persists. Her tenacity, her faith carry her forward, accepting this humiliation, “Yes, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters’ table.” There is little left for Jesus to say or do, but accept that his mission is far greater than he thought. Apparently, it extends to wherever faith is found (Winter, 1990).

(Brief pause)

When all feels dark and frightening, we must do our part to bring the light. When we observe, observe in love. When we speak, speak in love. When we challenge the status quo, do so in love. When we confront another, do so in love. Love is how we were made. Love is what holds us up and together. Love is the core of who we are, love, only love.

I will let Dame Julian have the last word today. While the thing she speaks of is a hazel nut, this seems to be a perfect metaphor for us, for our world.

“And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, ‘What may this be?’ And it was answered generally thus, ‘It is all that is made.’ I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning by the love of God.  
In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.”

~ Julian of Norwich

Amen

Reference:

Winter, M.T. (1990). *WomanWord: Feminist lectionary and psalter: Women of the New Testament.* New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co.