

Excerpts from Psalm 104 from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Bless the Radiant One, O my soul! O Heart of my heart, You are so very great! You are clothed with justice and mercy, arrayed in Light as your fine attire. You stretch over the heavens like a tent, your Radiance covering the waters; You shine through the clouds, and ride on the wings of the wind. The wind, like the breath of Life, carries your Word, Fire refines the dross of our souls. You set the earth on its foundations, strong and secure. You covered it with the deep like a garment, with many waters that life might come forth. At your Word, the waters divided, becoming rivers and lakes and mighty oceans; storms came to ensure the balance and to renew the earth. The mountains rose, the valleys became low in the places that you did appoint. You brought harmony to all the earth, that life might spring forth in abundance. Praise the Radiant One!

Mark 10:35-45 from *First Nations Version*

After that, He Takes Over (James) and He Shows Goodwill (John), the sons of Gift of Creator (Zebedee), came up to Creator Sets Free (Jesus). "Wisdomkeeper," they said, "We want to ask you to do something for us." "What is it you want from me?" Creator Sets Free replied. "When your shining-greatness is revealed," they said back to him, "permit us a place of honor beside you, one on your right hand, the other on your left." "You do not understand what you are asking," Creator Sets Free (Jesus) answered. "Are you able to drink the cup of suffering that I will drink, or endure the purification ceremony that I will endure?" "We are able!" they answered. "Yes," Creator Sets Free (Jesus) said to them, you will drink from my cup of suffering and endure my purification ceremony, but the place at my right and left hand is not mine to give. This honor belongs to the ones for whom it has already been prepared." When the other ten message bearers heard this, they began to look down on He Takes Over (James) and He Shows Goodwill (John). So Creator Sets Free (Jesus) called them together and said, "Other nations have rulers, such as the People of Iron (Romans). They like to show their power over people and push them around. But this will not be the way of the ones, like you, who walk with me. The great ones among you will humble themselves and serve all the others. In the same way, the True Human Being did not come to be served by others but to offer his life in the place of many lives, to set them free."

Today, we have the great honor of welcoming six new people into the membership of our church. That is truly a cause for rejoicing! It is an invitation to widen our welcome and deepen our community, to learn what moves us, what gives us joy or breaks our heart. It is an invitation to learn to see each other and to be seen by each other more fully as we, together, seek to follow in the Way of Jesus together. This is a great day to remind ourselves of who and how we are called to be together.

Our recent scripture texts have homed in on questions of what it means to follow in Jesus' way. Today's Gospel reading follows immediately on the heels of Jesus once again predicting that he would be rejected, killed, and yet rise again. He and his friends were literally on the road to Jerusalem where all this would take place. The first time Jesus shared this prediction, Peter wanted to reject the idea of his suffering outright (Mark 8:31-33). This time, two of his closest friends, James and John, were more interested in what was in it for them. Could they please each have a seat of honor when Jesus' "shining greatness" has finally been revealed, they asked? Oh, goodness. Here we go again. Not long before this, the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus told them then that they were barking up the wrong tree.¹

This time, Jesus asked his friends if they actually understood the cost of living the patterns of love as he does. Did they have any inkling about what God's love will do with and through them? Could they sense that their own lives would be changed if they truly walked in his way? "Are you able to drink the cup of suffering that I will drink, or endure my purification ceremony?" Jesus asked. Loving and truly seeing people, perhaps including yourself, who have been rejected out of prejudice, projection, or because of a past mistake, will still get you in trouble with those who want to have control over who is in and out, right and wrong. Saying that you can have direct access to God's love and that that love flows through everyone, regardless of tribe or religion, can bring down the wrath on you by those who exert religious control. Saying that God's non-violent and compassionate love is stronger than the armies of the world can bring you ridicule, the whip and the cross.

Jesus died modeling this life, not because God requires some payment for sin, but in order to transform our hearts and minds. Jesus wanted us to be freed from further suffering or perpetuating the suffering. In place of that suffering, he yearned that the disciples and we might be able to live resurrected lives, here and now. Oh, and how eager James and John were to say that they could drink this cup though they were still far from understanding. Jesus knew that the

¹Jesus again invited them into a life of service with an eye toward caring especially for the children and others who were most vulnerable or did not have a voice in society. We get lost when we let our functional ego put its concerns over status, honor and worth get to the top of our agenda.

Spirit would lead them eventually to live in a more heartfelt way. This offers hope for all of us as we are still growing and learning. In our text, Jesus reminded all who seek to follow that humility and service matter, not lording it over others.

We know that, for Jesus, compassion and presence are part of the way that we serve and truly see each other. I came across a video² featuring Daniel Emuna, a young man who decided to make an intentional shift in his life to really “see” others for the complex people they are. He realized one day that he was wasting time, spending hours and hours attached to his phone, scrolling through messages and postings. As the hours went by, he couldn’t even remember what he had read and felt disconnected from others. He also knew from his own experience what it felt like not to be seen or to be burdened with the projections of others. Daniel sensed that offering presence to someone who needed to be seen was to step into the realm of the eternal.

When he intentionally reached out to strangers, he recognized how much of what he yearned for, what he struggled with, and what had meaning for him was shared by others. As he says, "To connect with people, to really connect with people, you’ve got to be straight up, you’ve got to be real. There’s no other way to connect with people than to be true. And to be true means to recognize a lot of things within people that are within you. To be true means to say, ‘I see you for who you are and I’m going to do right by you.’" Everyone’s life is complex, including our own. What would become possible if we learned to see beyond politics or outward appearance to everyone’s deepest hunger, he asks. Daniel speaks to our shared human need to be loved and belong and our confusion about accessing and sharing this love, esp. when we live within systems that suggest that sharing and being compassionate can make us poorer and weak when the opposite is true.

I would like us to look at a segment of the video in which he mentions an essay that offered him a potent metaphor. [I See You | KarmaTube](#) (6:36-9:31). [I will spell out key aspects of that segment here in the written version for readers who may not see the video]. The author wrote that we are all paper mache constructions of those who love us. People sometimes add a piece to our life that helps to make us who we are. We can also think of people putting seeds into our

² [I See You | KarmaTube](#)

hearts that grow at some point and change our lives. In the spirit of Jesus, Daniel likens the space between our hearts as a garden which we can cultivate, using given pathways and finding new, sowing seeds, finding beauty, enjoying ripe fruits, and opening up to the seasons of life. “Things of my heart are also things of your heart,” he says.

Daniel also offers the metaphor of seeing the world we want to envision as a ship that has anchored on the horizon. The ship is full of the things we want when we are at our clearest and most connected: kindness, love, compassion. We can see it, but we have to decide if we want to make the effort to rope it in. Some may feel it is too far to even try. But when someone gives it a go and pulls on the rope, others may be encouraged to remember the gifts they have to help make it a reality. We may also get some rope burn as challenges inevitably arise but the more of us pull on that rope, the sooner that ship can come into the harbor of our lives.

Stewardship is about our care for each other – and others. About widening our welcome and supporting our church to embody that commitment. We come together as a church community to share in God’s vision of what is possible, to sow seeds together, to pull that ship into the harbor, to amplify generosity, to make a heart connection, to see each other and others who need to be seen as the children of God who we are no matter what we are going through. This may even mean that the impact we have on others can extend beyond this lifetime. I imagine that quite a few of you remember Barbara Lamb. She was a nurse and went into the peace corps late in her life. Barbara was always concerned that the church provide help to people in need. She was amazingly welcoming. When she died at age 96, her family left her booster recliner chair to the church so it could be borrowed by someone recovering from treatments or surgery. That chair just went to Hilary’s house so she can keep her leg up when needed after returning from rehab for her infected leg. Hilary knew and cherished Barbara and her husband. We can say that they are still tending to the garden of love together or adding pieces to the paper mache collage that we become as we touch each other’s lives.

Lynn Leclerc, who is joining today, tells the story of how her own grandfather became a model of such care and presence in her life (in her answer to one of our “get to know you” questions for new members). When her parents divorced when she was eight, the mom and children were left

to try to make ends meet and they couldn't. They ate the rations their military dad had stored in the bomb shelter he had erected for protection during the cold war era. Her mom was not comfortable sharing about their hardship or asking for help. Once her grandfather caught on, he showed up, packed them all into his car and took them food shopping. Each kid could also pick an item they were really hungering for. It didn't matter what it was. Little Lynn wanted to taste pickles again and her grandfather defended her desire for that. It was his generous way of saying: "I see you. I love you. You matter to me no matter what is happening in life." And that gesture of kindness is part of why Lynn's own heart is so open to caring for people who don't have money for food and why she always keeps a jar of pickles in her pantry as a reminder.

I encourage all of us to share the stories we carry about how someone in our lives or in the church saw us fully and how we were touched by another's care. I venture to believe that every time we care for someone else in love and presence or receive such care, we find ourselves seated next to the risen Christ. This does not happen as a reward or a trophy moment but as the lived experience of the joy that comes when we are truly connected heart to heart, for wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there Christ is also. That is truly worth the risk and our deepest gratitude.

Not included in my sermon but please note:

In the coming weeks, we will continue to hear short testimonials about how our church is sowing seeds of love, presence and generosity and how our ministries make sure that people are seen in their beauty, worth and their need.