

BELOVED JUSTICE

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, November 17, 2019

Scripture: [Psalm 139:1–18](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

What you sing, you believe... I know this because musicals work... we feel things even more strongly when suddenly that character in front of us bursts into song.

What you believe, you sing. So it is with our psalms, 150 songs of Israel, songs of heartbreak and joy, songs of hope and despair, songs of love... and of being loved.

This psalm, 139, is one of the latter... even though it never says the word love. It is a song about the wonder of being... and having been... a song of the wonder and mystery of God, which we need only to look at our own hands, our forms, maybe even into our own imaginations and thinking... in order to be lost in that wonder.

This is a song about the amazing works of God... so you, you amazing works of God, need to read this out loud. You are our scripture readers. Take your time reading this today.

SERMON

What you sing you believe. The words and the resonance of your own body help confirm the thing, the true thing, in any song. You could sing ballads and break-up tunes before you even knew what those things were, because there's something in the song that carries the meaning all on its own. That character in the musical? They might lie to another character, but when they suddenly burst into song, you know you're probably getting the true them.

But, sometimes, you can go back to a song that you loved, and it feels hollow.

I know that there have been times in my life when I have gone back to this Psalm, this song... and its truth has not been in me. It's why I'm thankful that we have a practice where we keep coming back to these words. Because we need the reminder. We live in a world in which we can easily lose our own sense of being a beloved and wondrous creation of God that this psalm sings... a God who loves us and has dreamed of the fullness of our lives before we even were.

We can lose it in any number of ways, beloved-ness. But one of the most painful ways it to encounter its loss, its violation, by someone who claims that they love us.

One of the most profound errors we can make in our lives individually, or as a collective community and society, is to diminish this sense of beloved-ness in another. It robs us of that mystery that the psalmist captured and sang out. The mystery that God placed in us from the start.

It happens all the time, this loss. It happens, and so often it calls itself love while it does. It happens, and it traps us and others in cycles of violence, fear, and oppression.

In Maine, it happens, or at least it is reported, every two hours and 5 minutes. ^[1]

We need to remember the words to this song of belovedness more often than every two hours, maybe.

We need to remember it so that we hear its echoes and can be clear, recognizing that in the past and in the present, people have used our own scriptures, or simply the cultural power of the church to insist that individuals suffering at the hand of another, should “bear the cross” they have been given... twisting things around until it sounded like Jesus was just another sham, telling victims to “stand by their man”

So let me be clear... Jesus came to know our lives, and indeed our pain, and transform it... not to invite us into his. And, since we're just a few weeks away from Advent, Jesus came to be incarnate to remind us that humanity is precious and capable of bearing the very imprint of the divine... a living walking song of this Psalm, fearfully and wonderfully made.

We need to this song, so when individuals or churches try to lift up stories in the bible, or from traditions of the church, in which spouses and partners are treated as property, or less than, or theologies with images of gender that are more informed by the Roman Empire that Jesus stood against than by his teaching...

we can know clearly that we can say to them, “the Bible says all sorts of things, but have you listened to what it sings?” Because it sings of belovedness for each and for all that cannot be denied.

We need to remember it, because too often church has been called a place too “nice” to talk about the violence in the home or in relationship, and a place that abusers have been given refuge in cloaks of responsibility and would-be-dignity in our institutions.

Let me be clear, the church is called to be a place where we are all... messy, incomplete, imperfect... are invited to be transformed into a part of God's justice, not a shield for us to hide abuse,

If any of these things have been true for you in your life... through our tradition, our church, our imperfect wander as we search for the way of love Christ calls us on... the church owes you an apology, and it owes you better... so let me say, “I'm sorry.” and let me commit us to do better.

We need to remember the belovedness and wonder of this song, so we can wake ourselves... that we might make sure that victims are not silenced, shamed, or trapped by our thinking or theologizing.

Even more, this belovedness gives us not only the strength to stand for ourselves... it gives us the courage to stand for others.

We stand, in a world that is transactional in so many ways, to insist that love or affection—or indeed the very affirmation of our God given worth—should not be wielded like a weapon or a tool to leverage or manipulate another.

...to struggle and create images of love and connection and family that do not bind one another into violent or oppressive gender expectations and roles. When I say this, you think women, but I have a whole 'nother sermon about the terrible and intractable image of male-ness that is torturing men and women alike...

...to affirm the LGBTQ+ community, recognizing that shame and isolation in those communities has been used as weapon against them by partners and others...

We stand to assert once and for all that “love” that exists to have power and control over another is not love. And love that hurts is violence.

We need to remember the words of this song because we need to stand together in it.

Martin Luther King once said, “Don’t ever think that you’re by yourself. Go on to jail if necessary, but you never go alone. Take a stand for that which is right, and the world may misunderstand you, and criticize you. But you never go alone, for somewhere I read that one with God is a majority.”^[2]

The question to us is today and always is... will we be willing to join that majority?

The hope of this psalm is that each of us is a miracle of God’s creation, and so beloved that God is never far from us...

If someone has told you you are alone? You are not.

If someone has told you that you are worthless? You are beyond all worth.

If someone has told you that are not worthy of love?

If someone has told you

I need you to hear this song, these words, and believe them, because you are the miracle of God that has been placed here in this room today,

I need you to hear these words, and believe them, so that we might share that belief, that hope and that belovedness with so many others who desperately need to hear them.

One with God

“I come to the end, I am still with you...” Held, called, comforted by the unending love of God... let us never stop until all the world may lay claim to that same promise that was made before they were formed even in secret.

You miracles of God. You beloved. You... amen.

1. <https://www.mcedv.org/learn-about-abuse/statistics/> ↩

2. King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Sermon at Ebenezer Baptist in Atlanta*, November 5, 1967 ↩