

“Needing some peace?”

Sunday July 18th

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I have a confession to make. I get a little overwhelmed by all the problems I hear about in our world today. Just to talk about a few; We have such a divided nation, and I'm not sure what to do about it. I don't know how often you've sat down with somebody you kind of know, and are a little worried about certain topics, whether you can have a discussion about those or not. Maybe its safe to stay with the weather, but maybe not.

Then we have this pandemic that we are dealing with, coming through hopefully. We are dealing with the effects of the isolation, the fear, the hostility. I know for me some of the isolation has been difficult, particularly not being able to see family. My daughter is finally coming over after two years, because the pandemic has gotten in the way. And its hard to have lived through that time of isolation and fear, perhaps the older we are, the more fear we might have had in this last year. And now, there is even hostility around the way we are dealing with it.

Then, if you just look outside and look at the color of the sun, we have this problem with fires and with smoke that we are told are related to climate change. And, we have floods in Germany and Belgium, as well as having people dying from heat and smoke problems on the West coast. We have a problem with change.

During this Covid year we have had the reality of structural racism, and its caustic consequences rear its head again, reminding us that it is part of our society, and it has real consequences. We have an economic divide that leads to some systemic poverty issues, both the systemic poverty and structural racism are things that the Matthew 25 project, a program of the national Presbyterian church, is inviting us to look at more fully.

And, if those kinds of global problems weren't enough, I suspect that each of us have some individual concerns. It's no secret that I have had a physical problem over the past year, sciatica, that has been my struggle. But then there is the concern for people in our lives whom we love that have medical or mental problems, or are experiencing loss or grief. We have everything from our micro to our macro problems that cry out for solutions, and yet I become a little overwhelmed. I know on my own, I have no way of solving all of those problems, and sometimes the weight and weariness wears on me. How about you?

That's why this passage for me was particularly timely. You know, I think about as we come to the sanctuary we often come to it as a place to worship. Yet, when I think about the word sanctuary, it feels like an invitation, not just to worship but to find sanctuary. It is exactly that which Jesus is offering his disciples, come away to a solitary place, a deserted place, a place where there are not those worldly pressures, and rest a while. We as people need that rest, we need rest for our physical bodies, we need mental rest, we need rest for our spirits and souls. We need time to rest, and recharge and renew, so that we can again enter the world. I am so thankful that Jesus takes this moment with his disciples, and invites them to take a moment - a moment to rest, renew, and recharge - to get away.

Not only that, when the crowd is there to meet them, we see the compassion of Jesus, in the midst of all that is going on, it feels like sometimes we're flailing around for direction, looking for solid footing, needing to get out of the fast-flowing currents for a moment. Sometimes I feel a bit like the

crowd. Certainly, when I go out in the world these days I don't feel like there's an easily defined central way that we are all going to go together. We don't hear much about God. It feels sometimes like it all is in the periphery. Mostly, we are supposed to solve the problems, because we have the capability and power to do so. But you know, there are a lot of times right now that I just don't feel like I have that capability and power. I can feel like a sheep without a shepherd, wondering which way to go. I need someone who will let me lay down in green pastures, lead me beside still waters, lead me on paths of righteousness.

So, I am thankful for this passage, that invites us to remember that God has come to us in Christ to give us that good shepherd. That God comes to us with the surprise gift of forgiving love, that invites us to know the promise that God will bring us peace through Christ; and as we recognize that gift, as we accept that gift, as we allow that gift to be central to us; we will be given access to the one spirit that leads us to the Father, and gives us access to the Father.

In this Ephesians passage we are invited to let Christ build us and them into one people, a new humanity. It is exactly what it feels like we need, because the old humanity that I see, is trying to do it on its own but seems to have so much trouble not veering off into vitriol, viciousness, and violence. It is, as we listen to the gift God would give us, a Savior who builds peace, makes us into a new humanity, gives us access to the one Spirit, so that we can have access to the Father. Through Christ, we begin to address a world so full of these divisions And, hearing Christ engaging us in a time of rest and a way to get away, allowing Christ to work with us in that way, opens us to realizing it's not just about staying apart, it's not just going away to find that place of solitude, but to use that time and space to recharge and renew, and re-ready us for being together. In fact, where this Ephesians passage leads us is to where God brings us together to create and build us into a place where God is at home. I think Ephesians says, God will dwell. In the midst of this world that is so problem laden, we are reminded to enter into the grace of God, to find those times away. And indeed, you know you don't have to go to the mountains, although that can be good; or to the sea, which can be good. The sanctuary is open in the middle of the week and there is nobody here, but we need those times when we can sit and listen, be in the presence of God and then allow God to guide us, and to build us together into a place, into a community where God is at home.

Ephesians talks about Jesus as the cornerstone, and as the cornerstone, Jesus shows us both the foundation, which is the grace that is the surprising gift of God's forgiving love, which then helps to create the building, us, a community of faith, into a place for God's presence to be at home. And when we can build a place where God's presence is at home, we can sit in that presence and learn from God's grace and learn from the teachings of Jesus, and allow him to lead us,. We have a way in the middle of a World that feels like it has no way. We have hope in a world that sometimes feels hopeless. We have one that we can trust, we can have faith in, in the middle of a world that sometimes feels faithless. We have one that leads us in love in a world that definitely needs more love. We have a God that gives us grace. Thank God. Amen