

When Jesus makes his inaugural address in Nazareth, he is given the Isaiah scroll. He reads from chapter 61 and sits down and says, “This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.” (Luke 4:21, New Jerusalem Bible.) He tells them two stories. One is about how Elijah was not sent to anyone in Israel but to a widow in Lebanon. The other is about Elisha who healed no lepers though there were many. Instead, he healed a non-Jew, the commander of the Syrian army. The synagogue’s worshippers think they get his point. They grow furious.

Another time, Jesus walks through fields with disciples. On the Sabbath, they pull grain off the stalks and eat it. They are hungry. Pharisees who are nearby see them and ask why Jesus does what is unlawful on the Sabbath. (Luke 6:1-5)

Another time a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner. A woman of the city sits down behind Jesus; kneeling she begins washing his feet with her own tears. She is crying and as she cries her tears drop on his feet and she uses her own hair to wipe off the tears. The host of the meal speaks to someone and wonders why if Jesus were such a prophet he would allow a woman like her to do this in his presence. Jesus takes his host to task. He shows how his Pharisee hosts have shown no courtesy at all while the woman cannot stop kissing his feet and cleaning them with her hair. Obviously, he hears what the Pharisee is wondering out loud. He tells the woman her sins are forgiven. He tells her that her faith has saved her. (Luke 7:36-50)

Another time Jesus directly rebukes Pharisees. “You clean the outside of cup and plate while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness.” (Luke 11:39, New Jerusalem Bible) When he leaves them, they begin working together “to catch him in something he might say.” (Luke 11:54, New Jerusalem Bible)

I offer these stories as background for our reading from Luke today. Jesus calls out to the city of Jerusalem. He expresses his longing to have gathered her children like a mother hen gathers her chicks. He cries out in pain, in regret. This is Jesus’ lament. It is his expression of sorrow, of mourning that Jerusalem and her people and her religious leaders have not responded to him openly. “You were not willing,” he says. “You were not willing.” What do we do with this? Where is the good news?

What if for a moment we could go back to each of these scenes. Could we say anything to these people that would change their minds? Could we say anything that would help them wake up? If we were able to do something and intercept their behavior—what could we say?

Let’s go back to each story. Jesus is in Nazareth. He reads from the Isaiah scroll. He tells 2 stories that show the amazing reach of God’s love. The people get indignant and angry. What could we say?

LISTEN TO THIS MAN! I KNOW YOU ARE ANGRY. BE PATIENT WITH HIM AND HIS MESSAGE. HE HAS SOMETHING TO TEACH ALL OF US ABOUT GOD'S LOVE. LISTEN TO HIM!

The second scene was in the fields. Jesus pulls grains off the grain stalks and eats them like a snack. It is the Sabbath. It violates the rabbis practice of Sabbath, but he does it anyway. What could we say?

I KNOW YOU THINK JESUS HAS DONE SOMETHING WRONG. MAYBE WE NEED TO LISTEN TO HIM. HE IS MAKING SOME AMAZING CLAIMS. COULD HE BE RIGHT?

Then there is the dinner with the Pharisee and the woman comes and kneels behind Jesus. What could we say?

I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE THINKING. DON'T BE SO HASTY WITH YOUR JUDGMENT. LISTEN TO HIM. HE CARES ABOUT PEOPLE YOU AND I NEED TO CARE ABOUT. PLEASE BE CAREFUL AND STOP YOUR SCHEMING.

Finally there is the time he speaks directly to the Pharisees and seems to insult them. He tells the truth about what they do and what they are really like on the inside. What could we say?

LISTEN TO ME A MINUTE. HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED JESUS JUST MIGHT BE RIGHT ABOUT US. LISTEN TO WHAT HE IS SAYING! I BELIEVE HE IS RIGHT!

This message and this lament of Jesus holds a promise for us. His words ask us to consider what he might lament about us. His lament is not the same. We have responded to this Savior, haven't we? We believe in him. We trust him and act out of his invitation to live.

Yet, there may be some who believe God has not called them to anything. "God has not given me any special gifts to share with others." But God has. God has given all of us here gifts we may share within this congregation. I believe each of us here are called to use our gifts and interests for the good of this congregation. Are you willing to wrestle with that idea? Are you willing to wrestle with God's call on your life? Ginny Creech is being installed as a deacon today. She has wrestled with this call. Mike Clark is suggesting he and others be a part of a ministry to neighbors of small house repairs. He has wrestled with God's call. Are you willing to wrestle with what God wants you to do?

Or perhaps you wonder where God is in the world...or in your life. Barbara Brown Taylor has written, "Do we build God a house so that we can choose when we go see God? Do we build a house in lieu of having God stay at ours? Plus, what happens to the rest of the world when we build four walls even four gorgeous wall—cap them a steeped roof and designate that the House of God? What happens to the riverbanks, the mountaintops, the deserts and the trees." (9, Taylor) In her book, An Altar in the World, she speaks of ways we all can experience God: waking up to God, paying attention, wearing skin, walking on the earth,

getting lost, feeling pain...all as ways we encounter God. Are you willing to experience God everywhere? Are you willing to pay attention to where God is at work in your world?

Georgia and I attended a retirement seminar recently at the seminary. One of the leaders commented how poorly we Presbyterians know how to celebrate. How celebration for many of us is to increase our volume on hymns we know at Christmas and Easter. Let me suggest another way. Are you willing to practice saying “amen” as you live through the day? I am not suggesting we start saying the word all the time as some do. There is nothing wrong with that. There is everything right with affirming, “Yes, I believe that” when we hear something to which we agree. It is a simple way to affirm what we experience in life. Are you willing affirm life with your “amen?”

Jesus does not lament over us as he laments over Jerusalem. When we do not believe we have a place in the church’s ministry, when we seldom experience God’s grace, when we never really celebrate what is going on or being said anywhere, God laments our disconnections. There is a promise buried in Jesus’ lament that as we respond to God’s abundant grace, we will come alive. The Spirit offers these words as encouragement so that we might REFLECT and PRAY—and find our place, and God’s grace and a way to celebrate the truth we experience in Jesus Christ.

God of all that is, help us to wrestle with your call. Enable us to be vessels of your grace. Allow us to learn better how to celebrate your presence leading us to share your compassion and care and truth in Jesus’ name.

Taylor, Barbara Brown, An Altar in the World, Harper Collins Publisher, New York, NY, 2009.