

“This is Us: Founding of the Kentucky Female Orphan School”

Psalm 68: 4-10

This Sunday we begin our Lenten Series... This is Us, Telling our Stories as the People of God. Yes, I know that I am shamelessly taking advantage of the phenomenon sweeping the nation right now... everyone's obsession with the Pearson family, wondering what will happen to them next, speculating on the events of their past and how these events still affect their future.

If you have not seen this show, I highly recommend it because this TV series does what stories do best...it captures our imaginations. It invites us into the most sacred and holy moments, moments which are always disguised as ordinary and everyday life. The narrative it shares strips everything away, leaving us with very real people with all their hopes, with all their hurts, with all their joys, with all their fears...all of it laid out before us, engaging these things as if they were our own. In this family's story, we see ourselves in the characters. Each week, we watch as the story unfolds, seeing them age and change as the years go by. Each week, we go along with them as they deal with all of life's ups and downs. We hurt when they hurt. We cry when they cry. We laugh when they laugh. And each and every week, as the show draws to a close, we simply say this is Us.

A similar experience happens to us when we read the stories found within our Bible. They capture our imagination. They invite us in. They challenge us to engage each other as very real people, people who are experiencing the good, the bad, the ugly and all the breath-takingly beautiful moments this world has to offer. The stories found within our Bible are not just some stories we tell on Sunday mornings because well, we need something for the preacher to talk about for the sermon. The stories found within our Bible are not just some history we need to memorize, with all its facts and figures, just so we can pass a test in Sunday school.

The stories within our Bible make up a larger faith narrative. It is a narrative which connects us with the presence of God in our midst. They are stories which celebrate God's life changing, life giving action in our world. They are stories which tell us of how love and hope came into being through Jesus Christ and transformed the world. They are stories which strengthen our faith and give us courage for the journey ahead.

You see, the stories we tell as people of faith, the narrative we create in our churches, in our ministries, in our relationships with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ tell the world there is a different way, a way which is filled with how the everyday ordinary moments of our lives are intertwined with the holy in our midst. They tell of a way which brings healing and wholeness to all of God's children. They tell of a way, calling us to reflect the light and love of Christ so that

all will know God is still at work in this world. They tell us of a God who never leaves our side, who offers comfort and hope along the way. The stories we tell as people of faith, the narrative we create and share as the people of God is our way of letting this world know that the darkness will not overcome the light.

Which brings me to our text today. It is a psalm which emphasizes God's care for and responsibility towards the powerless, specifically the orphans and widows. In this text, we are told a characteristic of God's very nature is to restore the people and to bring new hope for what lies ahead. Or as one scholar put it, "When God shows up, everything changes!"

In our text, the people are celebrating and singing praises to God because they know God is merciful, God is mighty. God protects those who are on the margins, the very ones society has forgotten or ignored. The psalm praises God for what God has done and what God continues to do. Unlike so many other psalms which lifts up the privileged few, this psalm praises God for seeing the people others ignore, praises God for God's protection of all vulnerable people. The people know God places these often forgotten ones within the wider family of faith, surrounding them with acceptance and love. They celebrate this offering of compassion and hope, knowing it takes nothing away from the larger faith narrative to show a little kindness to others.

Now, I'll admit this idea of God caring for the least of these is not anything new. We know that there are story after story found within our sacred text which tells us this about our God. There are verses upon verses within our larger faith narrative which remind us that we were once lost and alone. That God saw us, and lifted us up from the depths of our despair, giving us comfort so that we would know the gift of God's grace upon our lives. It is no surprise that within our larger faith narrative we are told as the people of God, because our God is merciful and just, we should be as well. I'm not telling us anything we don't already know. As people of faith, we have a call to share compassion with those who are oppressed and forgotten, to notice those on the margins, and to see all as Beloved Children of God. We know all this...so what I want us to do is instead of looking at this call to show compassion on a larger theoretical level, I want us to take a look at how this call relates to us as Midway Christian Church here and now.

And to do that...we need to talk about our past. This call to show compassion has deep roots within our story and narrative as Midway Christian Church. It still shapes how we live out our mission of Welcome today. It is a part of who we are as a community of faith. This call all started with the guy we see in the stained glass window over there. This gentleman is L. L. Pinkerton. He is one of the first ministers of Midway Christian Church. Now, in case you are wondering why he is there, and Jesus is over there....that's another story for another day.

The story as it has been told me is that Pinkerton was at a revival in Madison County, KY. He was seated in the pulpit area when his eyes came upon the frail form of a young girl who was blind. Pinkerton shared later, that then and there Christ inspired his heart to do something for the poor and the friendless; and the idea for the Female Orphan School rose before him as a call of God.

The story goes on to say that on a dark and stormy night in 1845, Dr. Pinkerton went to the church to hold a prayer meeting but only one person showed up. That person was the one of the elders of the church, James Ware Parrish. The two of them held the prayer meeting, discussing the work of the church. Pinkerton told James Ware Parrish about the idea of a school for orphan girls. After that, Mr. Parrish eagerly and enthusiastically began to help him plan to make the dream a reality.

The Kentucky Female Orphan School or KFOS as it would become to be known was founded in 1847. It opened its doors so that orphan girls at that time could receive an education, giving them hope for what lies ahead. Within our own congregation, we have several women who have a connection to this school, either as students who attended or as people who worked there over the years as the school changed its name. But its mission never changed...sharing compassion for the least of these so that knowledge and wisdom would guide their way, giving them hope for what lies ahead.

I share this story with everyone this morning not because it gives us the opportunity to feel good about ourselves and what this church has done in the past

I share this story to remind all of us that nothing is impossible with God, even if only one person shows up to hear about our crazy idea which is rooted in a call from God.. The person who shows up is the right person at the right moment to hear the vision and to help it come to fruition. I also share this story to challenge us as we look toward where God is calling us as a community of faith.

Because let's face, the need for compassion, the need for hope, the need for protection for the vulnerable still exists today. It exists almost as much as it did in 1845, maybe even more so, if the headlines of this past week are anything to go by. Headlines which tell us of budget cuts affecting the least of these, taking away opportunities for healthy and fresh food options, replacing them with products picked out by the federal government, not by the people who are actually eating it. We learned of headlines of another school shooting, the 18th in 2018 and we are only in February, stirring up the debate again whether this is a mental health issue or a gun issue, while ignoring the fact funding for programs that prevent bullying and support mental health programs are being cut again and again.

Headlines which tell us fees for adoptions are increasing yet again while the foster system in our country is overwhelmed and underfunded, a system which is

already struggling to meet the ever increasing need due to lack of funding and support. These headlines are just to name a few. The need for compassion, the need for hope, the need for all of us to answer the call to protect the vulnerable in our midst still exists today and it gets louder and louder every single day. The question is do we have the strength and the courage to answer the call.

Please don't hear me say that I think I have all the answers. What I do know is that our story as Midway Christian Church tells that all it takes to answer this call to show compassion for the least of these is a change of heart, eyes that are open to see the need in our midst and just one, one person who is willing to join our cause so that a dream, a dream which enables the Kingdom of God to come to fruition just a little bit here on earth, is all that is need.

It is my hope that this Lent, we take the time to listen to the stories of our faith, we listen to the stories of our narrative as Midway Christian Church and in doing so, we reclaim our place within the larger faith story, a story which celebrates God's life changing, life giving actions. It is my hope that being listening and sharing our story as Midway Christian Church, we become the community of faith God created and calls us to be.

So today and all days, may we always remember that what we do here in worship, in mission, in fellowship, in study as Midway Christian Church is not just

some story. It is not just a history which we need to get down before we forget the details. Our narrative as Midway Christian Church, as people of faith, more importantly as disciples of Christ, is about how love and hope came into being through Jesus Christ and transformed the world. It is the story of how our everyday lives are intertwined with the holy and sacred. It is a story about how we are transforming into the people of hope, the people of love, the people of WELCOME God calls us to be so that the Kingdom of God comes to life more and more here on this Earth. So Midway Christian Church....This is Us, telling our stories as the people of God. Amen.