

“We Trusted”

Isaiah 25: 6-9

On Thursday morning, I sat down to write this sermon yet the words would not come. Everything I had planned to say seemed inadequate and shallow in light of the real sorrow which fills our hearts right now. Words of comfort rang false given the stories of hurt and hate which are consuming our world, consuming our nation right now. Words of peace would force us to move on too quickly while ignoring the very real pain we are feeling as a community.

I sat in my office, imagining your faces, reviewing in my mind the many conversations we have had recently, wondering what is the one thing we need to hear today, that one thing which would invite the light of love into our hearts and open our eyes to the presence of God in our midst. As I sat in my office, I felt the weight of all our grief upon my shoulders, the grief which comes from our stories of loss and despair, our stories of broken dreams and missed opportunities, the grief which comes from wondering constantly where God is in the midst of all this pain and sorrow, this pain and sorrow which is threatening to overtake our world. In light of all this grief and sadness, I told myself there was no way I was up to the task at hand, the task of standing before you and offering up words of hope.

So while I was wondering what career would take me or if I should call the local restaurants to see if they were hiring, because after all, thanks to the mission of this community of faith, I can wash dishes like no other...while I was contemplating how quickly I could change careers before Sunday morning, my eyes fell upon a ladybug circling the light fixture in my office. And suddenly I knew exactly where God was and is in the midst of our grief.

For those who do not know, a ladybug is special for me. Each and every time I see one, I know my daughter Sarah is sending me a message, reminding me that everything will be okay. It will be 10 years in December since this beautiful soul came into being and next August it will be 10 years since this beautiful soul left me. Some days it feels like ages ago and other days it feels like it was yesterday.

This ladybug came right when I needed it the most. They always do. They come to me in the moments when I just want to give up and tell this world, you win. I don't have it in me anymore. When I just want to say, "World with all your pain, with all your brokenness, with all your love of power and might, you win", a ladybug greets me. On Thursday, I saw 3, all at different times, all in different places. And I knew. I knew I was not done yet. I knew there was still hope. I knew there was still grace. More importantly, I knew there was and is a promise of new life for me, for all of us to experience fully here and now as people of faith.

I share this with everyone this morning to let us know that we are not alone in our grief. We are not alone in our wondering. We are not alone in our pain. Today and all days, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, ancestors who stand behind us, all saying in a clear and resounding voice, telling us, “You are the result of a thousand loves. We are here with you always. You are loved more than you will ever know.”

This cloud of witnesses send signs to us, reminding us of this love, of this grace which brings us hope and comfort. This cloud of witnesses meets us in small and life giving ways each and every day, telling us that no matter how dark it may seem, the light of love is there guiding us. This cloud of witnesses shows us each and every day that we are not alone.

These are not just words we speak on Sunday mornings. These are not just platitudes we offer to ease the pain. These words are statements of faith. These words are what anchor us in the midst of life’s ups and downs. These words are what we know to be true. We know that God is here with us, actively working to bring healing and wholeness to all of God’s children. We know that the resurrection, the promise of new life is not just about some future light years away. It also is our present reality here and now. We know these words to be true because we have experienced them in our lives. Time and time again, God has been steadfast in God’s love for us and it is in this love which we have trust. It is in this

love which we have faith. It is in this love which we have hope, holding on to the promise that this world will never have the last word.

As I have lived with Isaiah's words this past week, I have wondered if he was not a Disciple of Christ long before we ever became a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, because like us, Isaiah is obsessed with the table. I'm not talking about the fact that we like to eat around here. I'm talking about how like us, Isaiah knows and understands the healing power of gathering around the Table as a community of faith.

In our reading today, Isaiah talks about a heavenly banquet where all are invited to come and partake, a banquet where God will act as host, lavishing us all with food and wine. Isaiah knows that at the table, God's promises of new life, promises of hope, promises of death being no more, Isaiah knows that it is at the table where these promises will be fulfilled.

Because at the table, we can come just as we are, with all our strengths, with all our hurts, with all our frailties, with all our joys, we can come to the table and hear once again that we are beloved children of God, beloved children of a God who loved us so much that God gave God's only Son so that we might live, beloved children of a God who has promised us that one day, all will be reconciled to Go. Isaiah knows that it is at the Table we can come and find hope because even

when we don't have it in us, at the table, we are always surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. At the table, we are always surrounded by a community of faith. Because at the table we are reminded time and time again that we are not alone.

Isaiah does this by giving us this beautiful imagery of God swallowing death forevermore, swallowing up the shroud and veil which holds the people captive. This image becomes a sign for us as people of faith, something to hold to forevermore, a promise to hold to when the darkness becomes too much, a gift to hold to when we simply want to say to this world, you win. However, let me be clear. Isaiah is not being false or shallow when he offers this imagery to us. This image is not a denial of death. This image is not a dismissal of the pain and sorrow we feel. Instead, Isaiah offers this beautiful image of God swallowing death forevermore as permission for us to defy it. Isaiah offers this beautiful, resounding image to give us the power and the knowledge to say that death and despair will never be what define us.

You see, as Paul tells us time and time again, we worship a risen Savior so to death we say, "Where is your sting?" Where is your victory?" Like Isaiah, like our cloud of witnesses, we know that pain and sorrow are only part of the narrative we tell. More importantly, we know that death and fear will never be what determines how we live our lives in the here and now. As ones who worship a risen Savior, we know there is another way and it is a way of life and love, a way

of hope and grace. It is a way which continues to defy the powers of hurt and hate of this world.

Or let me say it this way: On Monday morning, when I was reviewing my to do list, I remembered that I needed to run to GFS to pick up supplies for our community dinner that night. Suddenly, this became more than a task. It became a life line for me, something solid I could wrap my mind around, wrap my arms around in my despair with the world. I knew the healing power which comes when we gather around the Table as a community...neighbor breaking bread with neighbor, stranger being welcomed as a Beloved child of God, children laughing together, good food nourishing our bodies and our souls. Suddenly, this task of picking up supplies for our community dinner became a sign, reminding me that in our grief, in our joy, in our pain, in our sorrow, in all our times in between, as people of faith, we are called to come together as a community, to break bread with one another, coming together often times in spite of our different ideologies, in spite of our visible differences, even in spite of our differing political views, we are called to come together as a community, as one.

Because ultimately, when we do this, we proclaim, loud and clear, that God is here, holding us, surrounding us, inviting us to come into God's presence so that we can and will always know that this world does not have the last word.

Again...these are not just words we speak on Sunday mornings. These are not just

platitudes we offer to ease the pain. These words are statements of faith. These words are what anchor us in the midst of life's ups and downs. These words are our present reality as people of faith here and now. Thanks be to God. Amen.