

Sermon: Pentecost 4

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 7, 2019

Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm 66:1-8

Galatians 6:7-16

Luke 10:1-11,16-20

I wish that being a Christian was easier... I wish that living in our nation's community was easier too... I wish I found Aladdin's magic lamp... and the first wish I'd make... is that every time I made a wish... I'd get one more wish... so I'd never run out of wishes... and then I'd wish that we thought of ourselves less often... and of others more often... I'd wish that every weapon of mass destruction mysteriously disappeared into the center of the sun... and that the equipment which manufactured them would fail every time... or melt into a puddle of chocolate sauce...

I'd wish we experienced that what unites us is stronger than what divides us... that God spoke to us through billboards... and that every elected official read them... I'd wish God was OK with us testing her so we'd know without question what was of God and what wasn't... that our long term vision wasn't so terribly myopic... I'd wish instant karma was a thing... so we could immediately see how what we do affects each other and ourselves and learn from our mistakes... I'd wish that when we lied our noses would get longer... or like in the movie Liar Liar... that we could wish each other into unrepentant truth telling... I'd wish that televangelists would stop lying that their religion was right and all the others were wrong...

I'd wish that every peace officer's body camera worked perfectly every time and that they never fired their gun prematurely... and that every bullet fired at them... or in every mass shooting or drive-by shooting or robbery or case of domestic violence or murder... would automatically just circle back around 180°... and maybe word would get out that guns were pretty much useless for that kind of thing...

I'd wish that every time someone wronged someone else even when they knew better... especially when they knew better... that they'd feel how that person felt and would just stop doing it... I'd wish every person was able to speak their truth and tell their story and name their feelings without everyone else jumping in to try and fix them so they could feel better about themselves...

I'd wish that every person was able to earn a living wage... and was able to access health care... and that when... what they did... wasn't enough... when what they did couldn't overcome some kind of genetic inheritance... that no pre-existing condition would ever be excluded from their insurance...

I'd wish that we were all empathically connected... so we knew what it was... knew deeply what it was... to face racism... or poverty... or illness... or hunger... or homelessness... or addiction... or homophobia... or xenophobia... or Islamophobia... or anti-Judaism... and then maybe we'd get serious about social justice... I'd wish that every misogynist man... felt what it felt like to be a demeaned or diminished woman... or to be objectified sexually... I'd wish that environmental toxins found their way into the nearest black hole...

I'd wish that the distribution of wealth was more just... and that the three richest Americans didn't collectively hold more wealth than the bottom 50% of the domestic population... I'd wish that in this nation... we finally believe that black lives matter... that women's rights are human rights... that no human is illegal... that science is real and love is love... and that kindness is everything...

But it's no more up to me to be in charge of making these wishes... than it is for any one else... we are all in this together... we have to discern these things together... and reach consensus... because whether we're Christian or not... we are all tied together in unfathomable ways... in a pulsating web of life and death that transcends religious labels... some of us just know it... and some of us don't... but this consensus takes

longer to develop than I'd like it to... but it's God's time... not mine... it's God's will... not mine...

And Paul's letter to the Galatians is clear... God is not mocked... we reap what we sow... our actions have consequences... and Paul calls up short those who think they can make it look like they've changed on the inside... when all they've really done was become changed on the outside by following the Mosaic law about circumcision... that's why he says it doesn't matter whether you're circumcised or not... what matters is whether or not we're becoming new creations...

Today's reading from Galatians reminds us about last week's reading from Galatians and its... to-be-rejected-at-all-costs litany of the works of the flesh... and the to-be-sought-after fruits of the Spirit... but this stark contrast is problematic... it minimizes the reality of subtlety... nuance... extenuating circumstances... and creates a divide between matter and spirit... and mistakenly affirms dualistic thinking... either / or... good / bad... right / wrong...

The Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church in Milford, CT was the recent target of a hate crime... twice within the past few days... in response to decisions at the recent UM Conference... they had put up a sign that welcomed all people... Charles Yarbrough... from Nashville, Tennessee... said he didn't agree with the fact that the church was open to gays... and that that was not Christian... so he smashed the wood in the kneelers... sliced open the seat cushions... and shredded the wood on the pastor's office door... and was charged with a hate crime and third degree burglary and criminal mischief... and is being held on a \$50K bond... as for the church... they said they will be creating tougher security measures...

Jesus seeks new creations... and he sends his disciples out to encourage them... the first sending was in Luke 9:1-6... when Jesus called the twelve together... and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to cast out demons and to heal... this second sending... whether it's 35 pairs for a total of seventy... or just a lot... to be his representatives... reflects the familiar practice of sending out emissaries ahead of the ruler... to pave the way... to assess receptivity... to make sure there'll be a fitting welcome... in all the places he intended to go...

Jesus tells them to carry nothing... to pack light... to bring nothing extra that will distract them... just bring Jesus' word... and his peace... and if it's received... stay... and if not... go... but let them know... remind them... plant a seed that God's kingdom had come near to them... was offered... and it's they who chose to reject it... it's they... whose own shortsightedness prevents them... for now at least... from more fully realizing who God created them to be...

Disciples of Christ minister Ayanna Johnson Watkins... writes... our lectionary texts from Isaiah and Luke are different... they are decidedly "fleshy..." this closing text in the Isaiah canon tells of a coming restoration of Jerusalem and her people... using the metaphor of a mother's body and her nursing child... the consoling breasts... the sure hold of her comforting arms... the joyous bounce on her strong knee... there is a closeness... an intimacy to this comfort that the prophet wants to convey...

The Luke passage is less obviously about the body... but the thread is there nonetheless... this text is about a band of disciples testing out their sea legs of faith... and traveling ahead of Jesus to prepare the people for his arrival... but these disciples are instructed not to pack any bags or make any reservations... they go forth equipped only with the Gospel and the hope of hospitality... they are vulnerable... and they depend on those they meet along the way to meet their physical needs for shelter... food... and safety... they are encouraged to enjoy whatever is offered by their hosts... and they are not required to stay where they are not welcome...

No needless suffering is required here... what is required however... is a sort of vulnerability... the disciples have to rely on the grace and provision of God to take care of them on their journey... and as they go faithfully... they get to experience the strength... resilience... and capacity of their bodies to manifest the power of God... they heal and deliver... allowing other bodies to experience wholeness...

She concludes... both texts allow us to live into complex and divine relationships with our bodies... bodies with the capacity to manifest God's truth... God's love... and God's power... we have bodies that thrive on disciplined limits and dedicated care... these bodies can get us into trouble... they can also get us in touch with the very character of God...

And as we become increasing in touch with God's character... we won't have to wish for what isn't... because we will own all that God desires for us... and we will be able to finally keep all the peace... which rests on us...

Mike+