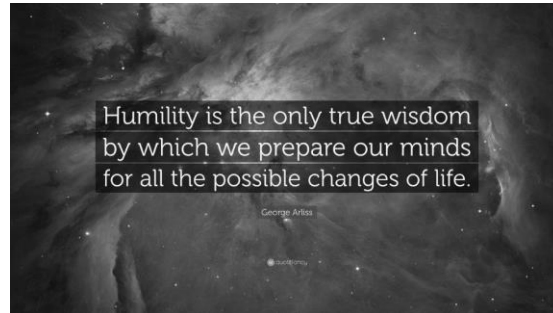


BEING HUMBLLED HURTS!



Scripture:

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

⁴Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; ⁵hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. ⁶Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; ⁷he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.

³³He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, ³⁴a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. ³⁵He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. ³⁶And there he lets the hungry live, and they establish a town to live in; ³⁷they sow fields, and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield.

Matthew 23:1-12

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



Those who humble themselves will be exalted, and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Jesus was angry with the scribes and Pharisees because they were using their position of authority and power in the synagogue to take advantage of the poor rather

than being servants of the poor as Jesus calls all of us to be. So this passage was kind of a threat and a curse on them from Jesus in anger about the leaders' neglect of the people they were called to serve. Nothing made Jesus more angry than the neglect of the poor and vulnerable. This is a teaching that all people in power today should pay attention to as well.

WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT?

At this point in time in the Bible Jesus had just answered their question when they were challenging his teaching in the temple. They asked him, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

That proclamation and new interpretation of the ancient scriptures was very upsetting to the Pharisees because they had prided themselves on keeping all the many minute laws as described in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. When Jesus makes it simple to follow God and when obeying the law is reachable to the common person, then Jesus makes being righteous in the sight of God possible for all of us, not just for the holier than thou temple leaders. And that infuriated them!

SPEAK FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK

Standing up for the oppressed was a long tradition in the Jewish culture and prescribed in the Hebrew texts like in our Old Testament where Proverbs 31 says: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves and for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and needy." (See Kid's Bible p. 112)

But the temple leaders had been focusing on making themselves richer and more powerful rather than being humble and helping the poor.

In Luke 12, Jesus goes so far as to say, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide for yourself a treasure in heaven that will not fail, where no thief can come in and no fire can destroy. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

COPING WITH TRAUMA

That our possessions are only temporary is a good lesson we have learned the hard way from the fires. Our treasures are in the relationships we have with one another and with this church.

Now I realize that might seem too easy for me to say since I have not lost a house with all my family heirlooms and kids keepsakes in it. But I would hope that if I had lost all my material possessions, I would find a way to cope as well as those who are here today. You all are showing great resilience and strength! It must be a daily challenge to get out of bed each morning and to not give up on God.

I have been wondering about the people dealing with this fire disaster who do not have a church to turn to. How do they cope? Faith, networking and social support are some of the main coping mechanisms for healing from the trauma of tragedies and loss. The church embodies all the things needed for coping with trauma.

Studies show that when you calm your heart with prayer, when you tap into your other spiritual resources such as feeling God's presence and comfort, when you lean on others who have faith for networking and a positive outlook on the future, you are able to adapt to a tragedy in a healthier way than those with no faith and no supportive church family.

A TRUE SANCTUARY

We had people show up to our church shelter those first days of the crisis saying they felt like they had no one in the world, no family, no friends, no place to go.

So I said to those who felt like they had no one, “Welcome to your new family.” One woman quoted that to her friends when they showed up and wanted her to leave with them. She said she liked it here and we were her new family. But they reminded her she had long time friends waiting to have her stay with them until she could get back into Oakmont.

This fire humbled us all. It created new relationships. You know who your true friends are when they reach out to you with support in a crisis.

I am so glad both Chris and Ray’s first thoughts were to come to the church when they had to flee the flames. They enabled this church to act out its truest purpose, to be a sanctuary and a refuge in times of trouble and in times of joy. And in those wee hours of the morning they swung open our doors wide so the whole community could see we welcomed everyone in need. There was no discrimination; even their precious pets were welcome.

POWERFUL NATURAL FORCES

Yet, I don’t believe God intentionally caused the disaster so that we would be humbled, but it was and still is a very humbling experience nonetheless. It was so shocking for us all to see how powerful and destructive natural forces could become when whipped up into a fire tornado leaving our city scarred.

Our human technology was no match for the firestorm. The fire and wind power combined was too much. We all felt very small and helpless.

Being humbled by the fire’s power hurts mentally and physically. When we are aware that humans have no power over such a fire, it is very frightening, too. Many people are having recurring nightmares. That’s a sign of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

PEOPLE THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF THEMSELVES

But the fire was not the kind of humbling experience Jesus was talking about here in today’s passage. Jesus was talking about when people put themselves up above others and feel righteous in doing so. They say lofty things

about themselves and behave as if the rules don’t apply to them. Those are the kind of people Jesus was pointing his angry finger at. (As Pastor Judy taught us last week, this is your angry finger. She showed us how to blanket all of our fingers with love as a calming method.)

The scribes and Pharisees in the temple were wearing oversized phylacteries and making the fringes on their garments longer than normal to attract attention as if they were holier than all others.

A phylactery was a little box worn on the foreheads and upper arms that contained passages from the Torah reminding them of how God saved the Hebrew people. The fringes were intertwined with blue threads added to the hems of their clothes or onto a shawl-like wrap that represented the six-hundred-thirteen precepts of Jewish law.

Jesus, at that time, may have approved of wearing these representations of their faith on the body, but he was speaking against those who attracted attention by making these symbols of their faith bigger and longer as if they were better than all others of the faith.

The six-hundred-thirteen threads making up the fringes on what some now call prayer shawls were intertwined with blue thread which was a symbol of the color of heaven.

Where do we let power and prestige cloud our own thinking in our lives? What do we do to attract attention to ourselves as if we are holier than others? Is it wrong to wear a cross on your neck? Can we go too far also?

(Who is your role model for leading a humble life? My role model is Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a Buddhist nun.)

FEELING HOLIER THAN OTHERS

Don’t we sometimes assume (if we were honest with ourselves) that we might feel a bit holier than others when we dress fancier at church than those who show up in their plain clothes?

**God knows our intentions.
God knows our motivations.
Our clothes don’t matter to God**

Basically, being humble in the Christ-like way is realizing that we are all the same, no matter if we have a private jet and slept on a cushy king bed last night or if we don't own a car and slept on a mat under the 6th Street Bridge last night. We are all equal and worthy of God's love and respect from one another.

BE REAL

Now is the time to be real about our feelings of hurt by the terrible firestorms. Now is the time to come together in humility and bond together as a community. We may still wonder if God was punishing us. We might wonder why it had to happen to us and not others. God understands all of these feelings and God wants us to humble ourselves enough with one another to admit we are upset and traumatized and in need of support and love now more than ever. Remember, each person copes differently and don't judge them.

SUPPORT OTHERS

God also wants us to remember to keep looking for opportunities to support others in need who might be worse off than ourselves. We are created to give them humble care and attention, to shine a ray of hope where the future may seem hopeless and overwhelming. And we are meant to acknowledge the hurt we are all feeling. Listen, be empathic and compassionate. And do all you can to humbly use the power God has given you to help them heal and feel whole again.

Encourage self-compassion. On November 10th and 11th our Presbytery is having a Mindful Compassion retreat at Westminster Woods that will teach about caring for yourself and others in body, mind, and spirit.

Music can be a soothing healer of the soul. Mark Beynon is the father of a daughter whose family lost their home in the fire. To help them with the healing he took her story and her comments about that day they escaped the flames, and he made it into a beautiful song to encourage her and commemorate what so many have gone through these past three weeks.

A video was shown to the congregation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZSQRq9ylIk&feature=share>

Amen

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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