

I come to you in the name of one God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen

Our Old Testament readings today have one of my favorite phrases in all of scripture. The LORD speaks to Jeremiah and says “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;”. And in our psalm the voice of humanity echoes with “I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother's womb you have been my strength; my praise shall be always of you.” As beautiful as these verses are, with the Holy Spirit’s nudging, I’d like to leave them aside for another Sunday and turn to Luke’s gospel.

We come in on a scene where Jesus is teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath when he looks up to see a woman, bent over and unable to stand upright. Pausing his teaching, Jesus invites her over and heals her of her ailment and she goes forth upright and praising God. This infuriates the leader of the synagogue who begins scolding the crowd, telling them that work is NOT to be done on the sabbath and that they should come looking for healing on one of the six other days in the week. Jesus retorts back with the line “You hypocrites” and reminds them that they adapt the law for living creatures such as oxen and donkeys, and should therefore also create allowances to care for humanity. And the temple leaders leave feeling shamed.

Two things really stand out to me in this passage. The first thing is the fact that Jesus probably knew his healing would cause trouble and he did it anyway. Because this is my first official Sunday as seminarian and an opportunity for you to get to know me better, I will share with you that this stands out to me particularly because I am an enneagram 9. For those who don’t know about the enneagram, it is a newer psychological tool for understanding personality, that loosely groups people by numbers 1-9 according to how they manage their emotions and perceive the world. The 9 in the enneagram is labeled as “the peacemaker”. This label sounds lovely until you realize that often the 9 is not the peacemaker because they’re standing in hard spaces to create peace in the world, but rather that they prefer peace to conflict so much that they will often turn their backs to conflict and pretend that it doesn’t exist.

Thus, I look at Jesus’ actions with some disbelief and a bit of fear. My internal 9 brain thinks “couldn’t you have just waited a day and made everyone happy?” But Jesus didn’t wait. He healed the woman in that moment likely knowing that it *would* cause conflict. Maybe he even *wanted* to cause conflict.

The second thing that stands out to me is that the leaders of the synagogue don’t come to Jesus to accuse him of doing work on the sabbath, but instead blame those who, the leaders claim, have come looking for healing. This seems like a very human response. Rather than addressing a problem directly, we who are in positions of power often look to those who are already marginalized or of lower status to pin the blame. Take poverty for example: How often have we heard someone with sufficient wealth name what “the poor” should do to get out of poverty, or said these things ourselves. When the more prudent task is to reassess the systems and policies that have created inescapable poverty

This short passage from Luke’s gospel challenges us in two ways: Like Jesus, we are called to push against the rules and systems that fail to honor the dignity of every human being, even if it creates conflict or makes us uncomfortable. And, we are called to avoid the temptation of blaming others for their struggles, but instead question the systems that marginalize and other

our neighbors in humanity. How are we to do these things? Especially if (as is the case in Luke's gospel) is a rule or a system that has been around for a long time?

Two weeks ago, Father Rob taught us that faith does not imply a lack of intelligence. Which is important because this call to push against unjust rules requires both faith and intelligence. Jesus's faith allowed him to look with love upon the woman before him and know that healing her would cause conflict, but to do it anyway. Jesus knew that his works and his teaching would lead to his death, but he did them anyway having faith that God was with him. Jesus' work is imbued with his faith, but it's not the only bedrock for his ministry. Jesus used his intelligence too. He knew his scriptures, commandments, and traditions well enough that when the synagogue leaders questioned him, he could respond with authority.

We too can know our scriptures well enough to defend the causes that ignite a flame within us. We can pair our study of scripture with the study of reproductive rights, or LGBTQIA+ rights, or effects of racism, or war, or socioeconomic divides, or any of the innumerable areas that need work. And we can integrate that knowledge with prayer, meditation, and faith in God. We can leave space for God to talk to us, for Jesus to be our guide, and for the Holy Spirit to move us to new ways of living and being.

And if this idea of being a voice for change and going against the status quo still scares you a bit (like it does me), then let us turn back to today's lectionary and the words from the book of Hebrews. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks". The work may be difficult, we may not see the change that we long for in our lifetime, and we may end up being "father against son" or "mother against daughter" as Jesus prophesied in our gospel text last week. But if we place ourselves on the unshakable foundation of Christ's love, then we can give thanks. We can give thanks for the brains that God has given us to think with, give thanks for the souls ready to walk in faith, and give thanks for the hearts with which to give and receive God's love.

We are not alone in this work. Remember those lines from Jeremiah and the Psalm. Our scriptures tell us that God knows us even before we were in our mother's womb. To be so intimately known means that God also intimately knows what we need to be supported in the work of justice and love. And we are not alone because (as Sam so beautifully reminded us last week), we are the body of Christ. When we work as a body, we have the opportunity to spread God's love in the world. Where is it that we as a congregation and community might make a loving change in this world if we were to combine our intelligence and our faith?

Therefore, as Paul says earlier in the same chapter of Hebrews;

"Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:12-13).