

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
 June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
 Ezekiel 17:22-24  
 Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14

All Saints' Church  
 Proper 6 Year B  
 2 Corinthians 5:6-17  
 Mark 4:26-34

As many of you know, next Sunday, my sister, Karie, will be ordained as a Deacon in the Lutheran Church in the Diocese of Olympia, WA.

When one of my closest friends heard I was asked by Karie's Bishop to preach at the consecration, she said, "How wonderful and terrifying!"

Exactly.

And I must admit, I have been struggling to think about how and what to preach on. I feel stuck. Many in her diocese will be present, many members of our family are coming, and many in the deaconess community, sisters consecrated to serve, throughout the United States will be traveling west for this service. I want the sermon to be "good."

This feeling of being "stuck," reminds me of a sermon I gave for my cousin, when he and three other biologists and their pilot were killed when their helicopter hit an unmarked wire. All the families had their own worship services- our family had a Catholic mass.

Yet, the Department of Fish and Wildlife of CA wanted to hold one memorial service for all 5 men, and a member of the Governor's office of CA called me to ask if I would give the sermon- there will be 1,000 people, the mounted police, the governor, American flags across the state will be at half-staff and the honor guard will be present, because these men have fallen in the line of duty. "Will you do us the honor of preaching?"

Both wonderful and terrifying. And I got stuck, then, as well. I wanted the sermon to be "good."

Rather than name my fear, trust in my faith, and call on God's presence, I got "intellectual." I got caught up in my Ego, in my capacity to preach, in my sense of importance, and wrote a sermon that was too academic, too cerebral, and too distant. I took refuge in my fancy words, not in the power of the occasion of mourning, connecting, and loving.

About 1/2 way through the sermon, I realized I might as well have been on another planet. I got through it, but it was painful. Maybe it was "good" on paper, but simply put, the sermon was a bust.

I don't want that to happen again for my sister's ordination service, but I can feel the nemesis of my ego rising up and wanting to take over. How do we break away from this Ego Thing?

Thank goodness for today's gospel reading. I think simply put, Jesus is saying that in all the ways we scatter the seeds of our living, whatever they may be, the power of God's spirit is within it all, and we, not knowing how our growing happens, need to trust in the presence of God's transforming love guiding it all.

In other words, trust in your heart and the good God heart of others & keep on walking.

Jesus goes on to ask, “With what can we compare the Kingdom of God or what parable will we use for it, for “this growing”? And then he takes a mustard seed, which we barely can see and reminds us of the miracle of its substance, its capacity to become the greatest of all shrubs, a place that gives solace and sanctuary, that gives birds a place to rest, to nest and to make a home. From something so small, in fact something indiscernible, to become something so great.

This is who we are, this tiny seed. Jesus, in the hidden mystery of who he is as both the Christ and a human son, is inviting us to our own hidden mystery- our own capacity as sons and daughters and who we are, as Paul reminds us, as the Christ. Because “in Christ, (in this seed) we become a new creation, where the old has passed away, and everything has become new!” We, too, can become a place of solace and sanctuary to others.

We can do and be all of this, but not by relying on our Egos, our self-reliance, our talents, our connections, our strengths... not to say that those things are bad, they just are limited, if they are not grounded in prayer, in faith, in patience, in waiting, in listening..... in the continual awakening of God within, as we pray for God in our heartbeat, in our breathing, in our thoughts and emotions, in our hearing, seeing, touching and tasting. It is by being awake to this God in us that we can see God in the world around us.

That’s what I missed when I preached at my cousin’s memorial service. It was too much about me, about my fears, my limitations, my anxiety, my talents, and I missed the beauty and grace of being present in the moment and seeing God in each other.

The more I think about our life of faith, the more I realize that it is not about finding God, but rather about letting ourselves be found by God. It’s not how we are to know God, but rather how we are to let ourselves be known by God. It’s not how we are to love God, but rather how we are to let ourselves be loved by God. I think this letting God in helps with that Ego Thing that keeps wanting to take charge.

A few years ago, while still working at Phillips Exeter Academy, I had the good fortune to become the chaplain to several Muslim convening’s throughout the United States. Muslim scholars, clerics, leaders gathered every two months to gain support for each other and I was there as a Christian presence of hope and prayer and solidarity. Amazing year!

We were gathering in San Francisco, at the same time the Dalai Lama was speaking in town. One of the members of our convening thought it would be a good idea to invite the Dalai Lama to our think tank. A last minute invitation. No one thought he would come, but he did!

I will never forget waiting for him in the lobby of the hotel, as he stepped out of the car with his translator and walked toward us. Word had gotten out that he was meeting with us, so there were journalists, but what I most remember were Buddhists coming to him for his blessing and how he walked and touched and smiled his way to our meeting room.

He sat patiently as he listened to all of the questions from these Muslims leaders, those he was honoring by his presence. In the midst of all the seriousness, he laughed- this big belly chuckle which started somewhere deep within him, rising up, shaking his whole body.

So surprising! As he spoke about suffering and loving his enemies... he was radiating joy and peace about the beauty of life, the light of Grace, all the while he talked about persecution.

His answer to all the questions: Prayer..... that foremost in his private meditation, he allowed the suffering of his people *and their oppressors* into his heart, because oppressors suffer too and struggle to find happiness and deserve our compassion.

The only place evil is going to be transformed is in our hearts by loving all. And that his specific pain needed to become apart of The Pain, which is everywhere.

I don't know about you, but I am really bad about praying for my enemies, (or even people I don't like) but I do think there is a key here to letting go of our Ego Thing. That by loving our enemies (and by the way that also includes loving the things you hate about yourself), this becomes the raw material for compassion.

Jesus sees us as tiny seeds with the capacity to give rest and solace to all, not just our neighbors or those we love. We just have to let go of this Ego Thing.

And so I keep praying to let Go of the Ego Thing, (some days are better than others)... to let go, let God, to be present, connected, and trust that words will come, that I will preach a good and loving sermon for my sister, that my tiny seed of trying to love my enemies will do some good in transforming me into a more compassionate one who experiences joy and peace.

We trust that God is transforming the world even in all its messiness, cruelty and fear into Something New. And that somehow, without know how, seeds that we are, are becoming a part of this transforming love.... This Something New!

And not to forget to laugh, a deep and large belly laugh. AMEN