

Sunday June 20, 2021

Scriptural Lesson: 2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

Sermon Series: Holy Transitions Part 1

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **We are concluding with our Holy Transitions sermon series; a series designed to name this idea that transitions are necessary for us all to begin to learn how to embrace both individual and collectively; if we wish to do the work of repair and reconciliation;**
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- And the way that I would like to identify one of the transitional themes that I see being presented in our scripture today, is by way of sharing a personal experience that myself and my family is experiencing right now;

- I spoke of my grandmother battling a returning breast cancer a couple of weeks ago and her desire to live until the age of 105;
- Well this past Wednesday around 11:07 am, my grandmother went on to be with the Lord at the age of 86;
- Furthermore, I need to be transparent with you all; for I believe that there is a powerful thing we all can learn from her story in naming this truth; and that is that **my grandma was not happy about this at all;**
- **For she was not ready to go.....**
- In fact, she was so unhappy with the idea of dying, that in many ways it seemed to me that my grandmother would have thought that her death meant that she in many ways failed;
- For she still had many goals left in her life;

- **My grandma wanted to make sure that** my cousins whom she has raised all of their lives; landed well in their young adult years;
- **She wanted more time to travel** and visit family and shop at her garage sales and shop through her catalogues; a lot of those good finds I know all of you know I was the main recipient of.
- **My grandmother wanted more time;** to share her love and thoughts and even participate in her political debates online on Facebook as she so avidly and passionately used to do...because at the age of 86, my grandmother became the social media and technology guru; it was very fascinating to witness and kind of comical to watch at the same time; this little bit of a woman (barely 5 ft tall if that); blast people online; in the name of Jesus, justice, love and liberation; I guess that is where I got all of this intense passion for justice and love for all from....

- **So my grandmother wanted more time church....**
- **She was not ready to go at all;** so much so that I believe that she wrestled with God quite a bit on this topic;
- For she was so convinced in her heart and mind that it would be God's will for her to beat the cancer again...for she beat it before.
- **So this is a round about way of my naming that I would not categorize my grandmother's death as being one of peace.**
- For she fought up until the very end....
- For she did not want to die;
- **None of us wanted her to die;**
- But for my grandma and a few members of our family; there was an unwillingness to accept this reality; that death was imminent;
- So much so; that when my grandmother finally was able to verbalize that she was ready to go;

only because I would imagine the pain of it all became so unbearable for her; **she chose to do so at a time**; where her family was not surrounding her;

- Her last breath occurred, when family members were in another portion of the home; and she was alone with her favorite hospice nurse.
- **And so church; the reality of it all has left me in a particularly sobering head and heart space this morning; because of course I am sad that she is not here with us anymore physically.**
- For my grandmother and I had a very special relationship with my being the oldest granddaughter; along with both of my grandparents being the catalyst for helping me to live out my call as a pastor.
- My heart also aches because of the transition that I am now prepared to name and I believe our

passage today is also implicitly naming for us as pursuers of God's love, grace and mercy for all to consider; if we wish to do the work of repair and reconciliation.

- And that is that in our faith journeys; **there are going to be some hardships** that will arise in our lives that will challenge this idea of success in our minds.
- **There will be some obstacles** in our work towards doing justice, walking humbly and striving to love like God; that will make us question if our work can even be done;
- **There will be some afflictions and setbacks and disappointments** that will arise in our journey known as life; that will sometimes make it difficult to know, if we have made any progress in our work at all;
- **For looking at my grandma's story again;** there seemed to be this question mark looming within

her as she was approaching the end of her physical life; as to whether or not she had fulfilled her purpose fully here on Earth; although from my perspective she was my superhero!

- Nevertheless, my grandmother seemed to be uncertain as to whether or not she truly did as John Wesley would say; “Do all the good you can,
- By all the means you can,
- In all the ways you can,
- In all the places you can,
- At all the times you can,
- To all the people you can,
- As long as ever you can.”
- Church, **my grandmother seemed to be concerned** with whether or not she did enough good.
- Questions that I sensed arose within her was whether or not she was a good enough mother, grandmother, woman of God and service?

- **She seemed to be concerned with whether or not** she could past this test that Paul was naming in his own life experience in our scripture today; that I suspect we all can resonate with on some level; whether or not she possessed enough endurance for not just her battle as it pertained to her cancer; but other areas of her life just as our text today is mentioning; afflictions, hardships, calamities,
- **5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;**
- So thank you church for giving me your heart space and headspace to hear about my grandmother's experience; to hear about her transitioning and how it has impacted my experience;
- For I seriously considered whether or not I should even be here today;

- But just like when in Luke 9: around verse 60 that I will paraphrase for you today; Jesus approached a grieving son and inviting him to follow him in His work for setting the marginalized free and the son's response was to ask for time to bury his father first; and Jesus response to him was; "Let the dead bury the dead;"
- It occurred to me that even in death; those that are left behind; (I'm talking about us,) **are still called to do our parts in this kingdom building;** our work must continue!
- Furthermore, **there are lessons to be learned** even in the midst of death;
- **There are lessons to be taught** and gleaned from; when we reflect and celebrate over the lives of those loved ones who have now joined in the great cloud of witnesses.
- **So I appreciate you all making space on this Father's Day;**

- For Father's Day is not just a day to acknowledge the father and father figures that are in our presence or have transitioned on;
- Father's Day and Mother's Day for me, has evolved into a day where I have learned to just celebrate the concept of family as a whole;
- Recognizing that just as the language of God as Father or Mother is meant to be taken figuratively; to represent that God is our Creator and that God is family;
- Father and Mother in our familial relationships in these days and times, can be taken to be figuratively in some cases as well;
- For there are many examples of family in our modern day world that we live in today;
- For in our family, although my grandparents were married; my grandmother served as a father figure and mother figure for many;

- I stopped by to declare that there are a plethora type of families to be acknowledged today;
- For this is also Pride month and so I would be remiss if I do not give a shout out to parents who are of the same sex, but still very much parents.
- I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the single parent families, the communal based families; the fictive families of people who are not blood related, but their bond is just as tight as if they were; the families where brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, foster parents, adoptee parents, friends, godparents, grandparents as well; have had to step up and serve the role as mother or father or caregiver to a child both young and adult; these are the families that we should acknowledge and recognize everyday; but today we accentuate it even more so and declare that family is something to be celebrated...Amen!

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- So, steering our conversation back to the transition I am seeing surface for us all to consider; it is in my grandmother's story that I feel led to raise before all of us some questions for us to explore;
- For I know that my grandmother is not the only person who have grappled with some of these feelings and concerns of feelings of failure and defeat;
- In fact our text reveals an entire community of Corinthians having similar concerns and challenges.
- So the questions I raise for us all today to ponder is how do we measure success both individually/collectively in our day to day lives?
- How do we measure progress in our work both individually and collectively?

- Furthermore, how do we make the necessary transitions through these emotional roadblocks that will occur from time to time in our journeys?
- How do we overcome these hurdles?
- What if we can't push through these obstacles?
- What if the weight of our work becomes too much?
- How do we know if we have done our parts?
- How do we know if we have achieved our goal?
- **Because the relevancy of all of these questions Church, is that sometimes it can be difficult to see our progress both individually and collectively; especially when we are not seeing any positive results in our situations.**
- Just like with any big challenge that we may be tasked with trying to find a solution to or take on;
- Whether it is in our every day lives and our goal is to for instance; lose weight or start a business from the ground up;

- Or if from a social justice stand point, we are hoping to make a difference in our communities as it pertains to amending laws that continue to keep the marginalized sections of our communities underserved and oppressed;
- Or if it is a challenge that is more intimate and personal such as a health crises that we are hoping to be healed from nor gain some relief from; or if we are just simply trying to put together again the shattered pieces of grief, loss, setbacks and/or disappointments;
- Church it can be difficult to see if any progress has been made on these types of situations; especially with the size of our obstacle is so darn colossal;
- It can be difficult to transition through thoughts that our efforts in such matters are hopeless, or useless or overall just in vain; if we are not seeing the tangible proof that things have improved.

- So this church, is where I believe Paul is coming from as he is addressing this Corinthian community;
- For Paul is raising a sobering reality of how difficult this work really is called life;
- For living a life of purpose is a lofty goal for the pursuer of justice who may not be able to see the fruits of their labor;
- Living a life of faithful endurance is a transition that will not be easy for us; especially if we have no real guarantee if we will be able to see the evidence of our contribution;
- **But you see Church as I approached our scripture in preparation for this message; I need to let you in on a little secret;**
- That normally when I prepare a sermon; I approach the process of exegesis line by line; verse by verse; starting from the top to the bottom.

- This time, my heart was so heavy that I had to work my way backwards as I engaged Paul's words;
- Because Church if you notice; the good news of assurance was contained in the first two verses;
- Our scripture says; verse 1 **As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.**
- 2 For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you."
- **See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!**
- And Church, this is a long way of my saying that it was difficult for me to discern where the salvation was in my current affliction;
- I would imagine that for those going through your own trials and tribulations; it can be difficult to

discern where the salvation may dwell in your own situations;

- So again, **I had to work my way backwards** to get to the point where I could receive the news that God's grace is still there;
- I had to work my way backwards **and start with my struggles** and
- **I had to start with my** disappointments
- **I had to start with my** tough questions
- **I had to start with my** grandmother's struggle
- To consider the idea that **there is good news** that could be forming that I may not be able to detect or recognize;
- **There is good news** as I reflect from last week's message that could be starting out like a mustard seed;
- A mustard seed that is 1 to 2 millimetres (0.039 to 0.079 in) in diameter in size;

- For The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds;
- But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.
- And as I began to think about this great mustard plant that started out so small;
- How many different seasons this plant had to endure;
- I started to think about how many different temperature cycles this plant must have had to endure;
- I started to think about how many storms this plant had to endure;
- Heck there may have even been a period where it looked like this plant would not be able to weather any of it if at all;

- Yet our lesson in Mark last week lets us know that the plant in this parable weathered it all;
- Whatever that plant was up against; the salvation lied in the fact that the plant still grew to be the largest and most glorious of all of the plants;
- Making it clear to me that this is how we know that our efforts are not in vain;
- Making it clear, that our progress and contribution towards building this kingdom of heaven on Earth as it is in heaven; with the aid of the Holy Spirit guiding us are not in vain;
- For the kingdom is still growing; even if we cannot quite see it;
- The efforts towards peace and justice is making a difference even if we cannot always detect it;
- The fact that Juneteenth; has now been recognized as a federal holiday; where June 19, 1865; many enslaved African American people in Texas learned that they had been freed;

- The fact that Pride month still persists and is ever more critical as communities and allies all over plan to seek protections against transgender children in schools along with fair adoption practice are insisted upon for same sex couples seeking to become parents;
- The fact that I and many other women are able to soar and persist in leadership roles when we once could not;
- The fact that all of these movements are being affirmed and insisted upon remaining alive and before the people without apology lets us know that the kingdom is growing;
- It lets us know that the kingdom will thrive;
- Whether we can perceive it or not;
- Whether we can tangibly see it or not;
- **See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!**

- Our salvation is here.....Our salvation is now....let the Church say Amen!

Sunday June 20, 2021

First Lesson: Psalm 9: 9-20

Gospel Lesson: Mark 4: 35-41

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- **We are concluding with our Holy Transitions sermon series; a series designed to name this idea that transitions are necessary for us all to begin to learn how to embrace both individual and collectively; if we wish to do the work of repair and reconciliation;**
- And for one of the first times in a long time; both of my messages today will sound similar; because both passages of scriptures although different; for this morning we were looking at an exhortation from Paul in 2 Corinthians and today we are in the Gospel of Mark; a familiar story of the disciples

facing a storm which I have preached sometime before;

- Some of the same theological concerns as pursuers of justice, love and inclusion for all, are being raised for us to consider both individually and collectively from my perspective.
- And so the way that I would like to identify one of the transitional themes that I see being presented in our gospel today, is by way of sharing the same personal experience that myself and my family is experiencing right now that I shared this morning;
- **For this time**, I am not going to rely on people to tune into both sermons;
- **This time, I am going to make** sure to repeat this story, because it is a story I believe that is worth repeating and hearing; not because it happened to impact me or my family per se;
- But because, I believe the rawness of this story and the powerful truth telling of it all, is something

worth directly addressing and repeating from the pulpit;

- Because I will preface my story by stating that **frankly, I do not think that** we as a community talk enough about the complexities of our faith as it pertains to God's work of justice and inclusion for all;
- **Frankly, I do not think that we talk enough about** the uncertainties of what our work to be loving and consistent faith bearers and seekers truly entails out of fear;
- Some of us may **fear that we may reveal** that we are not strong enough in our faith to do this work;
- Some of us **fear that we may have doubts** in our mission and work as much as we would like to think that our work is making a real difference;
- Some of us may feel **Fear that our efforts and work** is futile and useless or in vain;

- Others may have **fear that in our admission** of struggles, doubt, and the uncertainty of it all; that we are perhaps even blaspheming the God we declare to strive to represent;
- So I bear this experience with you all to let you know that as pursuers of this work of repair and reconciliation; that one of the main mental transitions that we are going to have to overcome; if we wish to get to the core of our work, is **this fear that God cannot walk with us through this fear;**
- To do this type of work we are called to do; we must learn to address our fear head on because I believe that when we do this; a holy moment of God's persistent love and grace may address our fear and remove it altogether so that we can keep persisting in our work.

- **So with that said; I spoke of my grandmother battling a returning breast cancer a couple of weeks ago and her desire to live until the age of 105;**
- Well this past Wednesday around 11:07 am, my grandmother went on to be with the Lord at the age of 86;
- Furthermore, I need to be transparent with you all; for I believe that there is a powerful thing we all can learn from her story in naming this truth; and that is that **my grandma was not happy about this at all;**
- **For she was not ready to go....**
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- For she fought up until the very end....
- For she did not want to die;
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- So much so; that when my grandmother finally was able to verbalize that she was ready to go;

only because I would imagine the pain of it all became so unbearable for her; **she chose to do so at a time;** where her family was not surrounding her;

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- **And so church; the reality of it all has left me in a particularly sobering head and heart space this morning; because of course I am sad that she is not here with us anymore physically.**
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passage today is also implicitly naming for us as pursuers of God's love, grace and mercy for all to consider; if we wish to do the work of repair and reconciliation.

- And that is that in our faith journeys; **there are going to be some hardships** that will arise in our lives that will challenge this idea of success in our minds.
- **There will be some obstacles** in our work towards doing justice, walking humbly and striving to love like God; that will make us question if our work can even be done;
- **As I attempt to weave our gospel into this conversation; there will be some metaphorical windstorms that will appear to capsize our boats as we pursue this work;**
- Not to appear to be a martyr or anything; but like I shared earlier, I questioned whether or not I would

even be able to preach today let alone do it well;
for my boat feels like it is about to capsize.

- But just like when in Luke 9: around verse 60 that I will paraphrase for you today; Jesus approached a grieving son and inviting him to follow him in His work for setting the marginalized free and the son's response was to ask for time to bury his father first; and Jesus response to him was; "Let the dead bury the dead;"
- It occurred to me that even in death; those that are left behind; (I'm talking about us,) **are still called to do our parts in this kingdom building;** our work must continue; so that our metaphorical boats do not capsize!
- Furthermore, **there are lessons to be learned** even in the midst of death;
- **There are lessons to be taught** and gleaned from; when we reflect and celebrate over the lives

of those loved ones who have now joined in the great cloud of witnesses.

- **So I appreciate you all making space on this Father's Day for my experience;**
- For Father's Day as I shared earlier, is not just a day to acknowledge the father and father figures that are in our presence or have transitioned on;
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- For in our family, although my grandparents were married; my grandmother served as a father figure and mother figure for many;
- I stopped by to declare that there are a plethora type of families to be acknowledged today;
- For this is also Pride month and so I would be remiss if I do not give a shout out to parents who are of the same sex, but still very much parents.
- I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the single parent families, the communal based families; the fictive families of people who are not blood related, but their bond is just as tight as if they were; the families where brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, foster parents, adoptee parents, friends, godparents, grandparents as well; have had to step up and serve the role as mother or father or caregiver to a child both young and adult; these are the families that we should acknowledge and recognize everyday; but today

we accentuate it even more so and declare that family is something to be celebrated...Amen!

- **So it is in this sharing though; I am beginning to feel some energy around this fear that the disciples had in this imagery of their boat capsizing.**
- For it is in this imagery that I feel called to name as a church **is a real fear;**
- **This fear of** whether or not the Church as a whole can sustain the impact of Covid and people finding meaning in communities that no longer require for them the traditional model of Sunday morning Church.
- **This imagery is a real fear** that I suspect applies in our individual journeys;
- **For some of us may fear** that our financial situations may capsize our boats;
- **Some of us may fear** that our health crises may capsize our boats;

- **Some of us may fear** that our grief may capsize our boats;
- **Some of us may fear** that the resistance towards our efforts of making spaces for those who have been discriminated, oppressed and marginalized will capsize our boats;
- And so this is a long way of naming that this is a real fear that these disciples had in our story today;
- Not to mention that if one were to take our gospel lesson literally; I will not insult you and tell you that their fear was not a legitimate one;
- For I researched the likelihood of an actual boat capsizing and the probability of it all is sobering;
- For if the wave is greater in height than the beam of the **boat**, then it can easily knock the **boat** over.
- Tests for instance carried out at Southampton University in England have shown that almost any

boat can be **capsized** by a wave equal to 55% of the **boat's** overall length.

- So with this information; why then would Jesus response to it all if you were to take this story literally or figuratively be to the disciples to have peace?
- For the reality of it all is that the boat can capsize;
- Looking back at the story of my grandma's journey; for my family..our boat has capsized.....the cancer has ended her life;
- So as a church then, how do we preach peace; knowing that there are times that our boats will capsize?
- How do we continue on with our work for justice; knowing that some of these metaphorical boats will capsize?
- How do we continue on this work; knowing this sobering statistic that we will not be able keep every boat from capsizing;

- For people will most likely continue to be marginalized;
- People will most likely continue to be discriminated against;
- Lives will most likely still be negatively impacted at the hands of violence, marginalization and more;
- So why even bother if the sobering news is that the boat can capsize?
- And this is when I revisit the sobering statistic that I have shared; that there is a 55 percent chance that the boat can capsize if the wave is at the right height;
- And focus on the other side of that statistic;
- That there is a 45 percent chance that the boat will not capsize.
- There is a 45 percent chance that the wave will not be high enough to capsize that boat and I need to say this church; although this is not a number I like to hear;

- It is a number that lets me know that there is still hope in keeping our metaphorical boats afloat;
- Furthermore, staying in this metaphor a little longer; my thought process is if I can continue to educate others and inspire others to continue to learn how to keep those waves of oppression just low enough;
- **To keep those waves** of injustices just low enough;
- **To reduce those waves** of discrimination just low enough;
- **To keep the waves of violence** and address the root causes of what increases these types of waves just low enough;
- Then this is how we increase the odds of our metaphorical boats staying afloat;
- If our work can keep addressing these systems that causes these waves to create so much

momentum to be so large in the first place; then this is how we keep our boats afloat....

- So to make this metaphor come alive even more so;
- I am thinking about how Juneteenth that just occurred yesterday; June 19, 1865, order represents the Federal Government's final execution and fulfillment of the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation. The people to whom this order was addressed were the last group of Americans to be informed that all formerly enslaved persons were now free; now being a federal holiday in the United States on June 15, 2021, the Senate unanimously passed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday; it subsequently passed through the House of Representatives by a 415–14 vote on June 16;

church this is an instance of us figuring out how to keep these waves of racism **just a little bit lower;**

- I am thinking of this being Pride Month; and right now this is an even more critical time not just for us as a Church; as we discern the way forward to ensure that our queer community is recognized, loved, supported, affirmed and included in every aspect of the church's leadership and traditions; but there is an upcoming battle where our LGBTQ community must take on; as communities and allies all over plan to seek protections against transgender children in schools along with fair adoption practice are insisted upon for same sex couples seeking to become parents; work that must be done for these waves of discrimination **to be kept lower;**
- Glancing back once more to the story of my grandma not being able to beat cancer again; I

see now that her legacy must continue on in her children and her grandchildren;

- I realize that cancer may have taken her earthly body, but **as a family** we can't let cancer take away her legacy of love, strength, faith, resilience and persistence;
- **As a family** we must continue on with the legacy she has left behind and keep the waves that may come up against us lowered so as to not capsize our boats;
- Church family with the knowledge that we have; that there is a 45 percent change and potentially more so; if we keep studying the conditions of these waves and the source of where these waves have come from;
- Then we must keep on keeping on; because there is enough tangible proof that although these boats can capsize;

- By working together through our efforts of our prayers, time, service, witness, gifts and witness; we must “Do all the good we can,
- By all the means we can,
- In all the ways we can,
- In all the places we can,
- At all the times we can,
- To all the people we can,
- As long as ever we can.”
- We know that we can keep our boats of justice, love and inclusion for all.... afloat.
- Let the Church Say Amen and Hallelujah!