

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Veterans Sunday and Prayers for Peace

Psalm 42, 1 Kings 19.1-15a, Luke 8:26-39, Galatians 3.23-29

8 November 2020

Salem, Bridgeport

“The Way to Peace”

There are times in all of our lives when we cry out with the psalmist, “Where is our God?”

Certainly now, in the midst of a long-lasting pandemic, racial injustice,
and a hotly contested national election,

the uncertainty and confusion can cause negative thoughts

to run round and round our brains in an endless loop that we feel powerless to stop.

Anxiety and depression and grief and fear affect us all at times.

But in our lessons for today, we find 3 keys to help us

whenever we find ourselves feeling overwhelmed.

We find the first key in the Elijah story.

Although God is always present in every situation,

Elijah is unable to sense God’s presence in the hurricane or the earthquake or the fire.

English translations of the text tell us

that Elijah heard God in a gentle and quiet whisper or a still, small voice,

but that’s not what the Hebrew text says.

The Hebrew text says Elijah heard God in “the sheer silence”.

Eckhart Tolle says that one of the ways to experience God,

to be present in the now, to be in God’s kingdom,

is to listen not to sounds, but to the silence that exists between sounds,

and the silence under the sounds, and silence all around the sounds.

He reminds us that sounds exist in the empty still silence and without that silence,
there would be no place for sound.

So when we need to calm our fears & anxieties, to soothe our anger & frustration,
& to lift depression & despair

we should stop and listen for the silence in the midst of sound,

because it’s in that silence that we can finally hear that still, small voice of God.

So the first key is to listen to the silence in which God can eventually be heard.

The second key is found in our gospel story of the man possessed by demons.
In that story we see a picture of a man who has been bound with chains being set free by Jesus.
Now physically, you and I do not have chains on our wrists or ankles,
and yet we are in bondage, nonetheless.

As Lutherans, we understand that no matter how hard we try to live saintly lives,
as long as we live on this earth we will continue to be sinners.

We are in bondage to sin and we cannot free ourselves.

This story reminds us that in God's eyes, there are no degrees of sin.

We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

You and I fall just as short as the person we despise the most.

All of us are in bondage to sin and none of us can free ourselves,

but Jesus does have the power to set us free – if we admit that we need to be.

We have to admit we are in bondage – we have to acknowledge the sins that bind us –
if we want to be set free.

So the second key is to be aware of the ways we are bound to sin.

The first key is to listen to the silence.

The second key is to be aware of our bonds.

And the third key we find in our second lesson, in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Sin is that which separates us from God and from each other.

Whenever we focus on our differences,

whenever we judge others, whenever we see ourselves as better than others, we sin.

Whenever we take sides, whenever we fight, whenever we see the other as our enemy, we sin.

Jesus commanded us to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus commanded us to love each other as he loved us –

enough to give our lives for one another.

Jesus prayed that we might be one even as he and God were one.

And Paul reminds us of Jesus' words when he says we should no longer judge others
by their religion, or their nationality, or their sexuality, or their social position,
or anything else.

There are no longer to be divisions between Jew and Greek, between Christian and Muslim,

between male or female, between homosexual or heterosexual,

between slave or free, between white and black,

between rich or poor, between mentally healthy or mentally ill.

So the third key is to look on one another as beloved children of God – to love one another.

As long as we live,

we will be beset by situations that cause us to be overwhelmed by feelings like

fear, terror, despair, depression, anger, rage, grief, sorrow.

But the good news is that we have been powerful spiritual tools to help us overcome such feelings.

These tools help us to focus on God, on ourselves, and on others.

Focusing on God, we listen for the silence.

Focusing on ourselves, we are aware of our bonds.

Focusing on others, we remember to love.

As we use these tools, we will be amazed at how God will work,
taking away those feelings of fear and anger and grief and sorrow
so that we can be at peace, set free, to love. **Amen**