

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: February 4, 2018

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7

Psalm 147

Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Mark 1: 29-39

“Discovering wholeness, healing, and joy do not save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we are healed and discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennobles rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreak without being broken.”

These words come from a beautiful new book entitled *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* featuring a dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Both men have experienced tremendous personal pain and hardship throughout their lives but share with the world a powerful sense of purpose and hope.

As you listened to the words of the first reading from Job, what was going through your mind? How did Job’s words make you feel? Perhaps you felt sorry for Job. Perhaps these words caused you to feel depressed; or you were reminded of your own struggles. The book of Job is actually a rather long poem that addresses the age-old question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This particular passage gives us a taste of Job’s lament and the despair he experiences in the face of the pain and hardship he is experiencing. If we were honest with one another, we would discover that there isn’t a one of us who hasn’t, at times, felt restless. All of us, from time to time, know the feeling of the pure drudgery of life. No doubt all of us have laid awake at night worrying about one thing or another. It wouldn’t take long to name those things, like the recent wild fires and mudslides in southern California; the violence in the form of shootings and abuse experienced across the country; the death of a young mother leaving a grieving husband with three children; addiction that ruins one’s life and that of their family. The list goes on and on. Job’s experience is all too familiar. And, he puts into words the greatest sense of despair that we, as humans, can experience when he says, “My days come to an end without hope. I shall not see happiness again.” Without hope? There can be no greater sense of suffering. Our ability to be hopeful in the midst of life’s inevitable challenges allows us to be ennobled rather than embittered; allows us to refrain from becoming hardened and to remain whole.

In the gospel we are given some examples of what healing, wholeness and joy look like in the midst of human suffering. First of all, Simon's mother-in-law is not alone as she suffers her illness. She is at home, surrounded by her family and friends. Hope is expressed in the love and concern of those who long for her healing. There is something about being with another in their pain or having someone with us during our times of hardship that engenders hope, even when there's nothing that can be done to take the pain away. We gather with one another, just to be together at the death of a loved one. We sit by bedside to offer comfort those in our life who are ill. We stand with one another in vigil to express our outcry amid acts of hatred. Secondly, Jesus reached out to touch and to hold Simon's mother-in-law's hand. This is an incredibly intimate gesture. Reaching out and touching engenders hope as Jesus helps her up to restore her to her place in this household. There is something about the touch of another human being that brings comfort and consolation. And, finally, once restored to wholeness, the natural response is to begin serving. Peter's mother-in-law gets up and begins sharing herself again with those in her household. She begins waiting on them perhaps in the way she always did. She regained her ability to return to living her life. As people of faith, healing, wholeness and joy are never solely for us as individuals. The gifts we are given are meant to be shared for the good of others. Once there is an experience of God's healing love, something in us wells up so that we are compelled to share that love with others in service. Once healed, service flows.

Wholeness, healing and joy are what we experience when we know the love of our community and feel a part of it. Wholeness, healing and joy are what we experience when we know the intimacy of a caring, healing touch. Wholeness, healing and joy are what we experience when we are restored to be able to share who we are with others. That's the source of our hope so that even though we may have hardship, we will not become hard; even though we may have heartbreak, we will not be broken.

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