

**What Kind of Day Has It Been?
Sunday, July 7, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman**

*You don't need money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
It's strong and it's sudden and it's cruel sometimes
But it might just save your life
That's the power of love
That's the power of love
+
Love Heals.*

For more than 25 years, our sister Becca Stevens has been whispering this in my ear.

In times of joy and hardship.

Trauma and triumph.

In times of meeting and parting.

For more than 25 years in my life, Becca has been the ruach, the spirit of the living God whispering out of a fire that burns without consuming, reminding us all to kick off our shoes and dance on the holy ground of life itself to the divine mantra

Love Heals. Love Heals. Love Heals.

At first glance, it feels like almost a Hallmark card sentiment.

Love Heals.

And yet when we stop to think about it, when we stop to think about our experience of love -- its passion and pain, its roller coaster of soaring spirits and broken hearts, how just bananas messy love can be and love is – we realize it is anything but greeting card fodder.

*First time you feel it, it might make you sad
Next time you feel it, it might make you mad
But do be glad baby when you've found
That's the power makes the world go 'round*

The healing power of love.

But how?

How exactly does love heal?

What does love healing look like?

The three readings we have today are not from today's lectionary. Frankly, they are the three readings I have chosen for my funeral, because they represent the consistent message of God in scripture that guides my life, however imperfect I am in its execution.

They are three love stories. Love stories to us from a God who literally dwells in us because God longs to be so close to us as to be indistinguishable from us. Like lovers who cannot get their flesh close enough together in their quest to become one person.

That's the power of love.

Three love stories that are really one. And like all love stories it begins with truly hearing and truly seeing.

God, the living love who is the divine speaks to Moses. She sings to him a song of love and this is what she says, she says:

"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them."

God doesn't say she only hears the cries of certain people ... and she does make a point of saying she hears and responds in an embodied, liberating way to the cry of people who are not at the center of power. It is what Desmond Tutu calls "God's preferential option for the poor and the oppressed" when he calls the church "the alternative community" where those who are most estranged from power and privilege are given center stage.

When people are crying out in pain ... God is listening. And then God asks ... are we?

Listening takes time and patience.

Listening takes a willingness to enter into the discomfort and pain of another.

I remember when the Ferguson uprising was beginning. I was incredibly uncomfortable at the chaos that was erupting ... and despite all that Becca and the amazing women of Thistle Farms had taught me about the need to feel to heal and the need to provide space for people to express their trauma if trauma was going to be healed.

Despite Alice Walker shouting in my ear that healing begins where the wound is made and the basic medical truth that wounds have to be exposed to heal, I wanted to cover up that wound as quickly as possible. I wanted to feel comfortable again.

So, I gathered a group of my friends from my Leadership St. Louis class and suggested we get together and do a series of teach-ins. Then we could instruct everyone about what was going on, we could fix it and then everything would be fine. We could sing songs of healing instead of listening to the cries of pain.

The sign of a good friend is one who will lovingly get in your face, and that's what Traci Blackmon did to me. She literally got in my face and lovingly and firmly said,

"Mike, you've got to stop.

"This is your privilege talking.

"You are used to being comfortable ... and when you are uncomfortable you are used to having the power and privilege to do something quickly so you can be comfortable again.

"You need to stop. Stop trying to fix this.

"You need to sit down in your discomfort.

"You need to listen, listen and then listen some more. And when you think you are done listening you need to listen some more. And then when you've done all that listening the only words out of your mouth should be asking the people whose cries you have been listening to: 'Here is what I've heard ... did I get it right?'"

That's such a challenging piece for all of us who, like me, are used to being able to fix things quickly and restore our state of comfort. It's why we have begun Telling The Whole Story groups here at All Saints around the land, the iconography and our history of racial segregation where the only job of the group is to do that first step of reconciliation - to listen.

And I know it's been frustrating that it has been a slow process ... and that's what it takes. To listen, listen, and then listen some more and then we think we are done listening to listen some more and then say "here is what we have heard ... did we get it right?"

There would have been no Exodus if God had not first listened, listened and listened some more. If our God, the God who dwells in each of us, was a God in whom salvation lies in comfort rather than in love there would have been no Exodus because the minute those cries made God uncomfortable she would have given that wound a shot of painkiller that treated the symptom and perhaps stopped the crying but did not heal the wound itself.

And ...there was an Exodus. Because God didn't just listen. God listened to the point of actually hearing ... to the point where God said I *know* their sufferings.

Now, if we've read Genesis we know something about knowing. Knowing is the ancient version of Netflix and Chill. As in Adam *knew* Eve. Wink wink. Nudge Nudge. Know what I mean?

God says to Moses,

"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings."

God has listened to the sufferings of the people so deeply that her knowledge of them became as intimate as if they were happening to her. Although we can never really know how someone else is feeling, the model of God is that we listen and encounter each other's pain and oppression so profoundly that it activates our hearts of compassion so that we feel it in our body, too.

It is when we cannot sleep at night because we have built a relationship with someone who is sleeping on the street and as we hear the rain falling on our roof, we realize it is falling on their unsheltered head. And the chill in our body and the breaking of our heart keeps us from slumber. And yet that pain is a gift because it is the very love of God stirring inside us.

It is when we have so encountered each other that it is no longer an option just to give the painkiller that eases the cries of pain and restores our comfort ... because we have so identified ourselves with their woundedness that we realize that we will never be healed until their wound is healed and their oppression is removed.

We have so encountered each other that like Fannie Lou Hamer we look in each other's eyes and cry "nobody is free until everyone is free."

The difference is what Aboriginal activist Dr. Lilla Watson meant when she said, "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

God dwells in you. God dwells in us all. And that means that God knows in the most profound and intimate way possible that our liberation is bound up with each other's ... and the process of liberation is not one freeing the other but all of us working together.

That's the power of love.

And so, God says not only

I have observed the misery of my people.

Not only

I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.

Not only even

Indeed, I know their sufferings

God also says “And I have come down to deliver them.”

Nearly a millennia and a half before the birth of Jesus, God is telling us that hers is an incarnational love. And so is ours.

In the prologue to John’s Gospel, we hear the poetry of the embodiment of this selfsame love of Exodus in first century Palestine.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

What does that look like? It looks like dwelling with one another. And how did God do that? That’s where we turn to Philippians.

Our reading from Philippians this morning is a portion of what is called the Christ Hymn, and it is largely considered the earliest example of Christian hymnody. And that means it is not meant to be dryly read but sung from the depths of our being.

Now there’s a whole bunch here about what it means to live God’s incarnate love, that love that is what is revolutionary about Jesus.

The first thing is that this isn’t a chore, though at times it might feel like it. The heart of it is joy.

“Make my joy complete” the author says. Share in my joy.

Do nothing from self-interest, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Remove everything that creates one dominating over another, be it a person, a culture or anything else. Do not think of yourself or your preferences or your customs or your culture – or how you think people should behave in worship or anywhere else as superior to anyone else’s ... and as a check against that in humility actually think of others as better than us, instead of difference being something we need to defend ourselves against, let it be our learned teacher so that our joy might be full as well.

And how did God do this?

How does God bid us to do this?

The singer sings

“Have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though they were in the form of god did not see equality with God as something to be grasped but emptied themselves, taking the form of a slave and being born in human likeness.”

This is about our power and privilege.

Now when we talk about power and privilege, I think we have to admit God’s got more than anyone. You can have your race privilege, gender privilege, ability privilege, sexual orientation privilege ... ain’t nothing better than God privilege.

And yet God recognized that the messy call of love was not to tell us in our suffering like we were some Spectrum customer, “your call is important to us ... and we can send someone to your home sometime between 9-5 Monday through Wednesday to try to be with you in your pain, please try to be home.”

God recognized the messy call of love, the greatest most complete joy any of us can have is to willingly give up our power and privilege for the other and physically, intimately enter into and share the pain of the other.

To give up what matters to us because we realize that none of it means anything compared to the surpassing gift of love.

That as our sister Aja Monet says:

“Radically loving each other is the only everything worth anything.”

More than money.

More than class.

There is a bigger and better and more glorious bottom line.

Because you don't need money, don't take fame

Don't need no credit card to ride this train

God’s joyful invitation to us is literally to become as much as is humanly possible one with the other who is in pain. It is the love ethic of the marriage liturgy when we talk about the two becoming one flesh ... that same kind of knowing ... only God, the great polyamorist, models doing that as a community ethic that embraces all creation. Or at least trying to.

When we hear each other’s cries that challenge our power and privilege, the way our joy becomes full is to have that same mind that is in Christ Jesus and not grasp onto our power and privilege but as much as possible putting ourselves in the shoes of the ones whose cries we hear.

To live together.

To hurt together.
 To heal together.
 To all be liberated ... together.

It is what Greg Boyle means when he urges us to “gather on the margins until the margins disappear under our feet.” That’s what the revolutionary Jesus did in being born as one of us. And his revolutionary call is for us to do the same.

And as we do, there is no end to the healing and transformation that can happen for ourselves, our community and the world.

That’s the power of love.

And ... even after all that, I’m still not exactly clear what that looks like.

I mean, if you’re like me, you’re kind of like all those other disciples, nodding our heads when Jesus talks but inside saying “Huh? How do you do that?”

Which brings us to our gospel reading. Which is my absolute favorite reading in scripture. And for those of you who have heard me talk about this Gospel reading before I beg your patience, as Lin-Manuel says, “one last time.”

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem with a crowd of his followers. Now there could be no more important thing for Jesus to be doing than going to Jerusalem. We talk about not letting the urgent crowd out the important ... well going to Jerusalem was both urgent and important. And yet something happens that changes everything.

Jesus ... who is wonderfully called in the first nations version of the gospel “creator sets free” shows us just how that liberation that is bound up in each other happens. A blind beggar, who looks like the lowest of the low to those walking by but whose name is actually Son of Honored One (kind of like Jesus himself) is crying out to Creator Sets Free by the side of the road for that freedom to rain down on them.

The very next thing we hear is the disciples scolding them and telling them to be quiet.

Now the disciples get a bad rap here. I think there’s something we need to remember about them. And that’s that these are people who have already begun the work of the Christ hymn. They have given up everything to walk with the revolutionary Jesus. They are fully bought into the mission in ways that I have never even approached. So, when they tell Son of Honored One to be quiet, it’s not because they are mean and cruel ... it’s because we all have learning curves ... and even though they are probably far ahead of me on their revolutionary Jesus learning curve they still have a ways to go ... and there is no shame in that. Which is why Jesus never berates the crowd. But neither does he let them set the agenda.

Dr. King said the riot is the language of the unheard. And Son of Honored One knows that, because as they are ignored they cry out even louder. Because sometimes that's what it takes. Many of us in this room and participating online know that. You know what it is like to cry out and cry out and be ignored. It's an awful feeling.

And while sometimes we get beaten down into silence, often, blessedly, we like Son of Honored One, cry out all the more.

And then Jesus does something remarkable.

Jesus stops.

Jesus stops for only one reason ... because he heard one person cry out.

And in that moment, the world changes

The world changes in the way the world changes when we engage in small acts of deep compassion, one by one.

The world changes in the way the world changes when we see each other's humanity, one by one.

We know that's how the world changes because it's how we have felt our world change.

Because we have moments in our life where we know what it is to have our cry heard.

We have moments in our life where we know what it is to be truly seen.

We know those moments are life-saving, life-sustaining, life-transforming.

We know it and like Son of Honored One, each and all of us from the very depths of our souls cry out for it.

See me. Hear me. Know me. Believe me. Love me.

We know the gift of having those cries heard and believed, and we know that gift does not happen without stopping.

And at the same time, we crave it from one another, we too easily discount our ability to provide that gift for one another.

Too easily, we convince ourselves that we could not possibly be that kind of force for transformation. That we could not be the face of God that another seeks. We forget that stopping ... and listening ... and loving ... could be our superpower. And, in fact, it is.

Too easily, we fall to the temptation to see the person crying out on the side of the road or even in our own community as annoyance or even enemy. To hear the cry as a distraction from the real work, forgetting that attending to the cry *is* the real work, that the side road *is* the real journey.

Too easily, we fall to the temptation that it's enough to quote Martin Luther King, Harvey Milk and Dolores Huerta ... and forgetting we actually have to stop, listen and love the black, brown and queer people who are right in our own community.

The blinding light of truth that comes from those among us who are crying out can be hard and convicting, but the liberation and healing it brings is worth it. I swear to God it is.

Mama always told me not to look into the eyes of the sun.
But mama ... that's where the fun is.

And when we forget. When we do as the disciples did in our Gospel story. When we greet the voice crying out with scorn, when we tell the voices crying out to be silent, the world cries out all the more.

And that's the gift of opportunity to us. I know it might not feel like it but when the cries get so loud, they cannot be ignored. The gift of the opportunity is not to quicken our pace until they are out of earshot or even without engaging to toss a few coins in hopes of shutting them up. The gift that will make our joy complete is to be like Jesus and not just stop but say "tell him to come to me."

And look what happens next.

Son of Honored One throws off their cloak ... get this, they are completely naked. They are fully themselves, not hiding anything from anyone.

They take the costly risk of true vulnerability of exposing wounds that have been ignored and stabbed again too many times in the hopes that maybe, this time there will be not even healing but even just acknowledgement.

What courage that takes.

And they come and stand in front of Creator Sets Free and then something absolutely amazing happens. It is the power of a question to break us open and transform us.

"What do you want from me?" Creator Sets Free asks.

The response of the Christ, the same mind that if we have it in us will make our joy complete is to when we hear that first cry to stop ... to take those who are most on the outside, those

among us who are crying out silently, loudly, or anywhere in between, and not only stop but put them in the center of the community just as they are and as they are becoming and let them determine the agenda for the entire community.

The love of Christ that heals and transforms is the love that says nothing is more important than healing the wounds of the person most on the outside.

That it is our joy to lay down our power and privilege for that task.

That it is our greatest joy because our liberation is tied up with one another in bonds of love. And it is love that liberates. It is love that heals. It is love that enables Son of Honored One not just to receive their sight again but to also have the class distinction between him and the crowd disappear as the “other” of Son of Honored One becomes part of the “us” ... not as a matter of assimilating to the crowd but fully as they are and as they are becoming changing the community in amazing, challenging and unforeseen ways as he joins the rest of the crowd as they continue on their journey.

As with all things, it starts small. As with all things, it starts with one person. When Becca talks about love healing, she often adds “one person at a time.”

There is so much going on in our world and in this church. It seems we are all crying out in different ways. And the challenge is when we are in pain, it is only human and natural for our pain to so consume us that we are challenged to hear and be in the pain of others. And yet our liberation is bound up in each other.

The first words I ever said from this pulpit nearly eight years ago were these:

Listen first, then sing.

And then together we sang a freedom song. A song that emerged from the streets of our cities a half century ago as our nation was awakening to the truth that our liberation is tied up with one another.

I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom.

And yet as any singer knows, the order of those two actions makes all the difference.

Listen first, then sing.

It is nearly eight years later. And the message remains the same.

Listen first, then sing.

If I can leave you with one challenge, one gift, as we part, let it be this:

Each day, find one person.

One person who is crying out.

One person who is asking for help.

One person who is shrinking away.

One person whom you are absolutely too busy to spend time with.

Whom you are tempted to dismiss or demonize.

Who is on the side of the road on which you are traveling.

Who is absolutely a distraction from things that everyone including you believe is so much more important.

And stop.

Stop what you are doing and listen to their cry. Invite them to share themselves with you.
Learn each other's names.

Listen, listen and listen some more.

And then tell them what you have heard and ask "Did I get it right."

Ask "what would you have me do for you."

Give them a word of courage.

A word of companionship.

A word of love.

And receive the word they have for you.

And there will be healing.

And there will be joy.

And one meeting at a time, we will begin to travel together along the way.

Because as American Buddhist author Pema Chodron says "If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teacher."

*The power of love is a curious thing
Make a one man weep, make another man sing
Change a hawk to a little white dove
More than a feeling, that's the power of love*

And dear Ones,
*You don't need money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
It's strong and it's sudden and it's cruel sometimes
But All Saints, Church, it might just save your life
That's the power of love.*

Alleluia. Amen.