

Saturday, May 2, 2020: [Psalm 23](#); [Ezekiel 34:1-16](#); [Luke 15:1-7](#)

The lectionary scripture assigned for today reflects the theme from last Sunday of the Good Shepherd. In Luke, we hear the story of the Lost Sheep, which I no longer can hear without thinking of a Bible study we had last year at Bethesda on the Parables from Luke. We utilized the resources from Professor Amy-Jill Levine from Vanderbilt University. She calls this parable from Luke, the 'story of the frantic sheep owner.' More on the theology there at another time (or check out her books for your own pondering! I highly recommend them.)

But what really got my juices flowing for today's reflection, is thinking about the purpose of Parables and why Jesus had them... As Professor Levine reminds us, Parables are truly an art form. They're complex short stories that should invite more questions than give answers. They are like poetry, a symphony, a beautiful oil painting... And like all good pieces of art, they're open for interpretation. Similar to a metaphor or a beautiful painting, they need to be delved into with some analysis, critique, and curiosity.

Parables are here to help us see the world differently, to challenge us... And when we're listening well, they will also often indict us! Parables, when they're doing their job, make us a little uncomfortable. Professor Levine plainly states, "So, if we hear a parable and think 'I really like that. It's really special' then we're probably not listening very well."

A reaction to a parable should be along the lines of "That makes me a little uncomfortable. That takes me out of my comfort zone... Maybe that's a story I need to hear again..."

During Zoom Bible Study this week Wednesday, one of the participants asked a really pointed question, "What would be the metaphors that Jesus would use in a parable to relate to our world today...?"

That question has stopped me in my tracks this week... As I ponder in particular this parable of the frantic sheep owner, I really can relate more and more to that inner sense of panic and fear of losing something so precious and important to me!

Maybe if Jesus were to teach in today in parables, they have to do with the loss of social interaction; longing for human contact; or desire to sing and worship IN PERSON and not through a digital means!... Maybe this whole situation we find ourselves in is on its own a kind of parable! We're all uncomfortable, we're all feeling convicted and conflicted in ways we never had to face before!

Dear ones, we're working ourselves well into two months of this shut-down. I don't know about you, but I'm feeling it like never before. I find myself just so tired of all of this and wanting it to be over... While, many of our congregations have begun to consider next steps and what the phases of reopening might look like and how to go about it in the best way possible, we're still not jumping right back to what was... We still have to be patient and cautious and smart about next steps. And that by itself is really tough to do!

What I hear when I listen deeply to your emails, text messages, phone calls and what's being said in our conversations over Zoom,... is that we're all beyond weary... We're all so very ready for this to be "over" and "get back to normal."

What I hear deep in the longings of so many of us, is the yearning for wholeness... Wanting to be together in worship, to sing and pray in person and not through a digital means – we want those things that feed the deep needs within us that cannot be fully met otherwise. Our precious sacraments, Eucharist and Baptism, are a physical means and expression of our connection to God and one another.

Without the ability to fully meet our deepest needs for the time being does offer up a weariness and maybe even a sense of panic or frantic feeling inside...

As uncomfortable as this can be and as unsettling as this temporary reality is, it also brings me a sense of relief and gratitude. My longing... and the longings I hear from so many of you tells me again (and in new ways) that what we do together as a Church matters.

The religious rituals, practices, habits that we've been following for centuries are built into the fabric of our being... When we gather together again in person, we will once again (though through safe means of course!) receive the fullness of the

sacraments. The gifts that we have as a people of God are meaningful and powerful, and what the world needs in the face of so much uncertainty and fear!

While we are not able to practice much of those familiar means, we'll continue to find ways to practice our faith together in new ways and even find ways to do so on our own in ways we perhaps never even did before, mostly because we didn't have to!

I am so very proud of all of us for having made it this far and not falling apart entirely without our usual spiritual nourishment! I'm so proud of each of you for finding ways to feed your faith and connect with God in your homes, for venturing into virtual worship and Bible study practices... Please remember.... this isn't going to be forever...

For now, I hope that together, we can continue to reflect on our deep longings, what we feel we're missing in our faith-lives and ponder what those things are teaching us today about God in our lives and in our world... Hold fast to the promises of Easter that life will always find a way to triumph no matter what! We are a resurrection people during a time of a pandemic or not!

Through this season of so much uncertainty, so much loss, there's also beauty in our longing and in the powerful ways we express our connection to God and one another. It's a season to learn in new ways that the Church is not a place; it is who we are. And once we fully realize this, we can be church anywhere.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBtmPiCgTol&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR2KmOwxhOI7yFjeS0NzW_RKBG8QZRMvFV5OGMIMPYBgONp5ulU4nqamk5k

Yours along the way,
Pastor Angela