

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: The Good News

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39

February 7th, 2021

"Empty Notes: A Reflection on John Philip Newell's

Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation

Over the past couple weeks, we have used John Philip Newell's book, *Christ of the Celts*, as our secondary source of inspiration to help us understand Jesus' ministry through a different, yet similar, context. Last week we looked at the story of Jesus exorcising a demon as Jesus was preaching and talked about how Jesus exorcises our unclean spirits by reminding us of our connection to God through the image of God. Our scripture this week focuses on the continuation of Jesus' ministry as he goes to heal, rebuke unclean spirits, and preach the good news to crowds of people and heal Peter's mother-in-law. This week we will look at how Jesus responds to the outcasts, the tired, the hopeless, the disenfranchised by his early ministry by spreading the good news and showing these people hope will never fade until we choose to stop believing in hope.

As we have talked about before, our vision this year is what does it mean to follow Christ? What does being a disciple and what does discipleship look like? We ended our reflection last week with talking about listening to one another and how listening to the Divine music of God helps us remember the goodness in ourselves and the world around us while still being honest to the pain and sorrow we feel as well. We have talked about active listening before and how active listening is an attempt for us to adequately respond to the needs of folks around us instead of reacting to someone. So, what does it mean to follow Christ?

John Philip Newell says this, "If there is to be a new birthing of Christ for today that serves the growing awareness of the oneness and sacredness of the earth, and if there is to be a new birthing within the Christian household of a wisdom that will fully serve the recovery of the divine feminine as well as the divine masculine within us and among us in our lives and world, then we must learn to hear the Heartbeat within the matter and deepest energies of the earth" (Newell p 54). He continues, "We must say

unequivocally that the notes of the universe are not empty. They are filled with God" (Newell p 55).

Too often we seek to find our relevancy in our walk with Christ by boosting our membership, only focusing on increasing our monthly pledges, believe our church is defined by activities and social hours, or our beliefs are determined by a doctrine or church law instead of the world around us. Too often we seek to follow Christ by only serving "our people" instead of realizing we are all sinners and saints who come to the table of grace and all a part of God's creation. Christ reminds us through his work, ministry, and way of being in the world that we are all sinners and saints in need of the liberating message of the gospel.

Mark 1:29-39 NRSV ²⁹ *As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

With Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus begins his ministry in Mark with an example of servitude by showing us the path of righteousness that God has set before us. This story is found in both Luke and Matthew with minor differences to each. This is Matthew 8:14-17.

¹⁴ *When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; ¹⁵ he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. ¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."*

The Gospel of Matthew not only shows the strength of Jesus' power, but the strength of Peter's unnamed mother-in-law. Immediately after being healed she shows the fruits of the gospel by her hospitality and her service to those who served her. Verse 17 is also a quotation from Isaiah 53:4 about a section in the Book of Isaiah about the suffering servant who has come to be the healer of the world. This is Luke's depiction showing the importance of Jesus' ministry to all people in all places of the world.

Luke 4:42-44 ⁴² *At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. ⁴³ But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I*

was sent for this purpose.”⁴⁴ So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.”

Each depiction of these stories shares an important message of hospitality, servitude, compassion, and love for another. Jesus finds his purpose in his ministry knowing he must share the good news to all people in all cities in their region. What is the good news according to these passages? The good news is liberation from suffering, freedom from sin, healing from pain, and redemption from all that is unclean and disconnecting us from our image of God. Christ has come to remind us of the heartbeat of God, which is our collective heartbeat of creation.

What does this mean for us today? It has been nearly a year since Covid-19 began and it has been two months since we have gathered in this space together. What have we learned in this time of disconnect with one another? Has this been an opportunity for us to reimagine the world and communities we are a part of or has this been an opportunity for us to complain about something else in our lives? Have we decided to see the goodness bursting forth at each new dawning of each new day or have we only seen the destruction of the world and stayed through the night fretting over events out of our control?

I have used this time both to reimagine my place in this world and I have also complained about nearly everything I couldn't do. I have used this time to see goodness in our world whether it be the healing of our earth from our lack of contact, hope being spread in a world so desperate for the good news and seen peace in the lives of my friends through new engagements, new babies, and new beginnings in their lives, but I have also seen violence in our country, given into my fears about finances and building costs, and allowed my anger to swell up and burst forth at circumstances I cannot control. The gospel does not teach us to be perfect, nor should it teach us to be blind to the troubles of this world, but the gospel and the good news brings us hope in our despair, peace in our violence, joy in our sorrow, love in our anger and hate, and justice in our inequities. The cross that Jesus died on is both a tragedy and our salvation all wrapped in the messiness and beauty of Creation.

Jesus shows us all these things throughout these stories mentioned today. He proclaims a gospel that heals the sick. He proclaims a gospel that casts out our demons of inequity. He proclaims the gospel as an opportunity for sinners and saints to break bread together, outcasts and wanderers of our

world a place to call home, the nobodies, poor and oppressed to see their value and worth. The gospel will not heal our problems that's why Jesus told us, "Take up thy cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

The gospel is meant to heal God's creation not to tell it how ugly and putrid it is. Let us be reminded the emptiness of our world is not all that exists. We may hear hollowed out words from our leaders, we may see empty buildings in our towns, and we may feel the emptiness of someone's soul after tragedy strikes, but the empty notes of world are only empty if we but choose to not see God in them. As we approach the season of Lent, may we boldly and passionately take up our crosses in the name of justice, compassion, grace, and peace to proclaim Christ the savior of our world. Amen.