

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Passionate Worship

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

September 20th, 2020

Last week, we reflected together on the practice of Radical Hospitality. We looked at a passage from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus called us to see past the violence and turmoil in our world and see one another's humanity to practice hospitality towards each other. Bishop Robert Schnase's book helped us see Radical Hospitality is needed in a world filled with such immense pain, grief, and sorrow through the story of a lonely man in the hospital. Lastly, I shared with you a story about buying a kid a brand-new bike for Christmas as a way to illustrate this idea of Radical Hospitality being practiced our lives. This week our theme shifts to Passionate Worship, but our theme of hospitality is still present in a parable Jesus tells about the Good Samaritan.

Passionate Worship means something different for each community. I think in our community, we are comfortable with a more traditional United Methodist service with a few songs, a couple prayers, spoken liturgy (when we are not in midst of Covid), a sermon, and a closing benediction. Passionate Worship is more than what we do here on Sunday. Passionate Worship is how we center ourselves here on Sunday and go out into the world to proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Passionate worship heals us, inspires us, and shapes us into the hope-filled people of the Gospel. Worship is more than just our Sunday service.

Bishop Schnase reminds me of my days in college where I studied Koine Greek to better interpret the New Testament. The Greek word for church is *ekklessia*, which is defined as, "called out of the world" (Schnase 34-35). So although we certainly call this building the church, we are reminded by the word *ekklessia*, that since we are called out to be the church in the world, the church is more than a building but the people. We cannot be the church in the world if we are not present with its needs, its lamentation, and its celebrations. We are the church.

Worship is a time for us to center ourselves, gather and refocus our energies to spread our goodness into our community. Our goodness is expressed by each of us based on our gifts, our talents, and our strengths. Worship helps fill us up and send us out into God's creation with a fresh mind, a heart filled with love and grace, and a passion to see our neighbor's lifted up and supported. We come to worship for different reasons though. As Bishop Schnase points out, " God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, and bind people to one another (Schnase 34). We may use different songs, liturgies, and prayers, but worship, for all faith traditions, is a way to bring us back to the center where God resides to shape us into the people we are being transformed into in order to share the Gospel with the world.

In our scripture reading today, we read the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is a story definitely about last week's theme of Radical Hospitality. However, if we look deeper into the story, then I think we can see our theme of Passionate Worship as well.

Before our story takes place, Jesus has sent the seventy disciples out to proclaim the good news to the poor and the oppressed. They have returned with good reports as they have healed many people and cast out demons just as Jesus said they would. Just before our passage read today, Jesus bestows a blessing onto the disciples who have returned proclaiming, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Luke 10:24 NRSV). Jesus commends the disciples for passionately attending to the work of the good news, and Jesus proclaims this passion as being a blessing. Because of the disciple's passion to do the work of Christ, they are blessed because they can see the goodness in the world that others fail to see. They seek out the wisdom of God and see the goodness in the world and respond by healing, teaching, and transforming others around them.

Following this blessing, Jesus is challenged by the lawyers, who were the experts on the Torah. A lawyer asks what one must do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25 NRSV). Jesus responds with the Greatest commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27 NRSV). Jesus is asked a follow up question by the lawyer and is asked to define who are neighbor is

(Luke 10:29 NRSV). This is when Jesus goes into the infamous parable of the Good Samaritan. This is the parable.

³⁰Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity" (Luke 10:30-33 NRSV). This opening section of the parable is important because our hero is the most unlikely character. A priest first passes by and most would think that a priest would have compassion on a dying stranger, but the priest passes on as if they had not seen the stranger. Next a Levite sees the stranger, but the Levite also passes by without concern for their neighbor. The Levites were the people who helped facilitate worship. They were the people who made necessary preparations for worship, and they were liturgists, musicians, and the descendants of the guardians of the tabernacle. Surely, they would help a stranger in need!

The hero of the story is the Samaritan, which was a hostile adversary of Judea. In the Gospel of John, the Samaritans and Jews are described as not interacting with one another at all and have no dealings with each other (John 4:9). They most likely fought in small skirmishes of armed conflict and were hostile to anyone passing through their territories. Instead, it is the Samaritan, the person who is supposed to hate their Jewish neighbor, who picks him up, tends to his wounds, takes this stranger to an inn, pays the stranger's inn fees, and tells the innkeeper he will pay whatever fees accrue until he returns (Luke 10:34-35). A stranger tends to the needs of a stranger. They most likely never met again, but this still did not stop the Samaritan from responding to the need of a neighbor.

I think we would all like to call ourselves the Samaritan of the story, but are we? I think many of us feel like the stranger right now. We are beaten, broken down, left for dead on the side of the road, discarded from society as others pass on by asking why we are crying out in pain, asking why we are being so hysterical, asking us to be quiet because they have more important matters to tend to in life. So, we wait for someone to notice. As we wait, we become bruised and mangled that will accept help from any person, even our own enemies, just so someone notices our grief, sorrow, anguish, and help and support us.

I think more often than we would like to admit we are also the priest or the Levite who is too busy to deal with this, too busy to help someone in need, or too focused on our own problems to help our neighbor. Instead of responding to the needs of the world, we react to the needs of the world. We react and say this is the right thing to do, but I can't put in the work right now. We react and let our emotions, our confusion, fear, and anger get the best of us and say well there must be a reason they are injured and lying waiting on death on the side of the road. We think they were probably doing something they shouldn't have or hanging out with the wrong type of people, serves them right. Too often, we react instead of respond.

How could we reinterpret this parable to today? Would it make us uncomfortable if the parable read something more relevant to our lives? But a Black Lives Matter supporter while traveling came near him; and when she saw a Blues Lives Matter supporter she saw him, she was moved with pity. But a Trump supporter while traveling came near her; and when he saw a Biden supporter he saw her, he was moved with pity. But a Muslim while traveling came near him; and when she saw a Christian she saw him, she was moved with pity. Are we too blinded by our own misconceptions to see God in each other? Can we be the church and be the Good Samaritan more often than not? Let me be clear, it is not about perfection in our deeds and actions, but it is about responding to the needs of the people and doing what we can to support one another.

How in the world does this tie into Passionate Worship? There are a couple quotes from Bishop Schanese's chapter on Passionate Worship that help us understand this. He says, "Passionate spiritual communities not only worship and pray at Sunday services, they also make worship an essential element of every mission trip, youth program, adult retreat, capital funds campaign, and ministry initiative (Schanse p. 49). He says, "People feel welcomed and supported; they sense belonging, mutual affection, warmth, and connection (Schanse 51). Lastly he says, "Every congregation, large and small, is a tapestry of hope and hurt, a collage of experience and anticipation, a patchwork quilt of gifts, needs, fears, and aspirations. People come to connect to God and one another as well as to feel restored, reminded, remembered, and refreshed" (Schnase 56). The Bishop helps us understand that worship is more than just our liturgies, prayers, or the music we sing, but it is our practice and daily disciplines as we respond to the needs of our communities and individuals.

Worship is how we practice our faith. If we cannot do our best to live out our Christian values and principles in the world, then why are we continuing to worship a God who calls us to be love in the world, to develop empathy for strangers, seek justice against the powers that be, and to give mercy to those who are in need of help and support. May we remove the plank from our own eyes, humble ourselves in the sight of the world, and realize our worship is about living our faith.

I leave you with this challenge. How can our worship reflect our values? What are our community values? In short, I would say we do a great job at supporting one another in times of grief and pain. I would say we do a good job of responding to those who come to us in need asking for help. I would say we do a wonderful job at loving each other regardless of our differences. How can we continue developing these values and skills we already have, church? Let us look to one another in hope and love as we continue this journey together and build the Kingdom of God together for our future. May we do so with a fervent passion and holding out a helping hand for our fellow neighbors. In the name of the God whose image we are made in, Amen.