

TRICIA'S HOMILY – JULY 18, 2020

This week was another funeral, 8 year old Secoriea Turner. She was killed in Atlanta by someone with a gun. Echoing too many before her, her mother spoke powerful words “They say there’s a reason. They say time will heal. But neither time or reason will change how I feel.”

How often are we told in the face of loss or tragedy that “everything happens for a reason”. It is part of God's plan.” Now I do believe the time will come when Secoriea’s mother will feel God’s healing, no one could live with such pain forever, but there is no reason why her baby is dead except too many guns, too much violence, greed, racism and fear. Her death is not part of the plan for any God I believe in. Rather as it is said in Psalm 116: *precious in the sight of God is the death of a faithful ones*. Secoriea is precious. God is grieving with that mother.

It is common these days for people to exclaim” I can't wait to get back to normal” . Now, I too want to be free of masks and restrictions on where I can go and with whom I can gather. But then I remember all who are grieving. I remember seeing a man with a sign standing on Spokane street under the viaduct. He was old, black, thin with white hair. What in our society left him to be there on the side of the road, instead of at home with his grandchildren, safe and warm? The old normal is also a society of gun violence, people living on the streets and systemic racial injustice. What we want is a new world that reflects God's justice, the kingdom of heaven. That is God's plan.

Last week Ed Hill shared a useful way forward in our time: “don't argue, educate. Don't vilify, empathize, you do not know what harm this person has experienced that they cannot even hear you”. 2 weeks ago Deborah reminded us that we are called not to epic heroic actions but simple acts of kindness, a cup of water for someone who is thirsty. With these thoughts as a guide, let us see to God's words for today.

The kingdom of heaven is like....mmm what are we so sure is the truth of Jesus vision in these parables?

The first is the one about the man sowing good seed, but weeds grow too. He decides to let them all grow together until harvest time. We've been told this is about good and evil and

heaven and hell. Really? What farmer or gardener allows the field to be overwhelmed by weeds all summer until the harvest? The weeds would choke out the wheat and the weeds in the story are dandelion, which is poisonous! Mmm

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone sowed in their field, it grows very large and birds nest in it. We are taught: a little faith grows huge. Except, the mustard plant in the wild is deadly and in the garden it tends to get quickly out of control. Also, no one wants birds flocking to the garden or field to eat all your produce. Mmmm

The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who puts yeast into 3 measures of flour. Now I'm thinking warm crusty bread leavened to perfection. We can all be yeast! , but yeast is used as a negative in every other place in the Bible (for example, the Pharisees words are yeast and as it spoils the flour.) 3 measures is a huge amount of flour- enough for 100 people! Sounds like a mess. Mmm

Ack! these parables are not what I have been taught!

We all want to trust what we have been taught about how our world is like the kingdom of heaven., particularly when it is working for us. But Let's return to Ed's admonition: educate not argue. Education is possible only if I accept my own ignorance, my lack of understanding. (There's a specific warning in the Wisdom reading for us as believers- God is not happy when we speak with temerity, or " sass." Thinking we know it all.) What if the parables are to warn us that no person or religion or culture or people knows the whole truth of God's plan for the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven will never come about as long as we have a hierarchy of who gets to speak and define what is good, what is true. As a US born woman of great privilege, and a white face my education has been sorely lacking in both substance and interpretation. For example, I cannot name the tribes whose land we live on, I did not hear of the internment of the Japanese in school. I was very surprised to hear we have military bases named for confederate generals who fought for slavery. I wonder what privileges I risk as many comfortable notions I have held are challenged.

As always, there is infinite hope for all of us. The reading from Wisdom tells us of God, the One whose world we hope to live in- "God has the care of all, God's might is the source of justice " (not our puny selves), God's immense power is what enables God to judge with leniency and clemency and forgiveness. Imagine if the power forces in our society-the police, schools, politicians, bishops saw power as a call for leniency and forgiveness. Isn't this the ground of Ed's empathize not vilify? Giving space in our hearts and minds for new ways of thinking?

I've been trying this week to open my ears and eyes and heart with greater humility to hear all another is saying, particularly with people with whom I do not share much common ground, whose life experience is radically different. It has been strangely both difficult and liberating. Many of you have undoubtedly heard this, especially you teachers. It is THINK. T-H-I-N-K. Before speaking I am trying to ask myself

T: is it True? . In How to be anti-racist, Ibram Kendi sets straight many things we have been taught are "true " about both race and how to be anti racist.

H: is it helpful? Does what I am about to say, educate or argue? Is this the new path of which Deborah spoke? the path of the Kingdom of heaven?

I: is it Inspiring? Does this bring the fruits of the Spirit into the conversation? Peace? Perseverance? Courage? Joy? Love? Generosity? etc

N necessary. Is it necessary ? Silence can be deadly when we sit back and allow racist and sexist jokes or comments to go without challenge. Rob McCann, the Director of the Spokane Catholic Charities spoke out last week, admitting "I am a racist and have benefited from racism" This is necessary. But silence can also be a way to allow people to speak who are often silenced by tradition, age, race, intellectual capacity, and cultural norms.

K: Kind Is it kind? We heard in Wisdom that justice must be kind. Our psalm sang of God abounding in kindness. Is what I am about to say like a cup of water to the thirsty? Is it -an act of kindness?

Our gatherings each week feel like a long conversation in a world with many disturbing and confusing events happening every week. There may not be a reason, at least not a justification for many of the things that happen. But I do find that praying with all of you does shed light on the kingdom of heaven for which we strive. You bring the Spirit into my life. I give thanks for each of you.