

Full Sermon – Listening to the Ancestors, Telling it to Our Children

In a space like this, in a time like this, we are grounded by being present with those who came before us, those who shaped up, those who taught us who we are.

I have heard people say over and over this weekend: “These are my people.”

We have been listening this weekend to stories – stories as we gather into one large body, stories at table, stories over meals.

They are stories of both of journeying to a place, and coming from a place.

Hearing and saying the repeated sentiment – “These are my people”

These days, I have been listening to the ancestors

There seems to be too much heaviness in the world for me to stay present

I don't have to share the litany of events with you for you to know; but it seems fitting that we honor the ones who have fallen – even as Stonewall has been evoked,

we remember just a few short months ago Pulse nightclub

the list is so long

so very long

the streets, the dance halls, the school parking lots, the playgrounds, the churches are littered with the broken bodies of someone's beloved

Waking up whole feels like a victory when hashtags of death dominant our social media timelines.

The Lord is my shepherd, I won't be neglected.

God makes me lie down in green pastures;
and leads me beside still waters;

God restores my soul.

Yahweh leads me in right paths
for the sake of God's own name
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for the great "I am" is with me;
I am comforted by your gentle protection.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will be at home.

OT scholar Walter Brueggeman – says of the psalms they are the refusal of silence before God.

An understanding that "an adequate relationship with God permits and requires a human voice that will speak out against every wrong perpetrated either on earth or by heaven."

Orientation
Disorientation
Reorientation

Psalms can present us with, a disorienting trust.

trust psalm that arises out of lament

It names reality and expresses trust even in the midst of ongoing struggle

Psalm 23 walks us through all three: orientation, disorientation and reorientation

Ancestor Lucille Clifton

*won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?*

*i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.*

A favorite
May people's first memorized scripture
Often one heard at funerals

I don't know how many of these lost beloved ones perhaps may have had psalm 23 recited at their home going services

It is a defiant psalm

The lord is my Shepard
Mine
I dare you to say Jesus don't belong to me

It seems like it is so gentle
Your got your quiet paths
Your gentle streams

But I think, like much of scripture
This is a psalm of defiance

This is a psalm that says my God shows up
And sometime my god shows out

And as a follower of Jesus you best believe I'm going to do my best to do the same

I'm showing up

My beloved siblings
Thank you for showing up

For each other

For yourselves
For me

Showed up and I know some of y'all showed out

Now. Here is what I deeply desire
That we are strong in all the places the forces of evil have decided we are weak
The forces that have pitted communities against each other
As if there cannot be more than one identity in the same body

In the same (corporate) body
In the same individual body

Because it will make them mad, or uneasy, or withdraw their support
Our being here in this place together is testament to the fact that we show
up for each other
But we have to do better

Ancestor Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.*

*Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed —*

I, too, am America.

Hearing about the gift the children of Germantown are receiving and being in their communities is maybe the most important thing I heard yesterday. It reminds me very much of what my home congregation gave me. I was nurtured in a racially integrated congregation in Cleveland. My normal was black, white and multiracial families doing church together.

This was my normal. This is what I thought church was – diverse people coming together because they were church

It took growing up to show me this was not the norm for most people, nor is it yet.

We know from the history of BMC, the history of congregations like Germantown and so many others that this kind of community does not happen on its own.

It takes tending.

It takes seed planting.

It takes shepherding.

The exhilaration of being with “your people,” that rare space that you sometimes have to claw your way into, and when you get there, when you find it, when you find your people it is precious.

The danger of protecting that space so carefully is that it becomes just like the oppressive spaces you were fleeing. You may not notice it, but others will. And our children will not put up with that, because we raised them better.

December 5, 1955 Rosa Parks – Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted 381 days

Stonewall. June 28, 1969 ushered in gay and lesbian rights movement

The death of 17 year old Trayvon Martin on February 28, 2012 was the catalyst for the current iteration of speaking out against state sponsored black and brown was started by 3 queer women of color and a hashtag This past June 12 in Orlando—the killings in the Pulse nightclub showed up again that we cannot take gains in one part of any movement for people’s lives for granted.

We cannot afford to let false dichotomies keep us away from one another.

We cannot do our best work in creating a world where everyone is free if we do not acknowledge the ways in which we belong to each other, the ways in which we are familiar with the valley of the shadow of death.

One more ancestor – Audre Lorde:

I read these words from Audre Lorde to my class a couple of weeks ago.
Here they are for us all.

"I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had even spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you.... What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language." I began to ask each time: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?" Unlike women in other countries, our breaking silence is unlikely to have us jailed, "disappeared" or run off the road at night. Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.

Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end.

And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking."

Audre Lorde

Yes - though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Though I walk through the valley
Though I walk through
I walk through
I walk
When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death my siblings are
with me
When I walk through
Yahweh God

"I am who I will be"

You are with me

Creator, lover, sustainer, fighter God

You are with me

You are with us

We walk

We walk

We walk through together

And we bring each other home.

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