

Second Sunday of Easter – Year A

Do you know how it is, when a snippet of a song, or a phrase, gets stuck in your head and keeps on playing, as if on a continuous loop? Over the last few days, what's been playing over and over in my head is this: "Is there any word from the Lord?" I finally stopped trying to make it go away and just sat with that phrase – even though it's not from any of our Scripture readings for today.

It comes from the book of Jeremiah, the prophet, when King Zedekiah is in the midst of disaster. King Zedekiah comes to Jeremiah, "secretly in his house" – and asks him, "Is there any word from the Lord?" In other words, Does God have anything to say here? Where is God in all this?

In his commentary on this verse from Jeremiah, theologian Paul Tillich says this:

"Let us not be misled by the phrase '*word from the Lord.*' It is not an oracle-word telling us what to do or to expect. Then what is it?

"It is the voice from *another dimension* than that in which we ordinarily live. It cuts *into* the dimension of things and events which we call our world. It does not help us to manage things within this dimension more successfully than before. It does not add to our knowledge of the factors which influence a situation, it does not remove the responsibility for our decisions. It *does* something else. It *elevates* the situation in which we have to decide, into the light of a *new* dimension, the dimension of that which is *ultimately important* and *infinitely significant* and for which we use the word 'Divine.'

"...The word from the Lord is the word which speaks out of the *depth of our situation*. It is, one could say, the *deepest meaning* of the situation, of *every* situation which comes to us in such words."

Put very simply – again, in Tillich’s own words, a word from the Lord is “the *eternal* cutting into the *temporal*.” It is God, or the Divine, or the Spirit, or however we want to name the Ultimate, cutting into our world, shedding new light on the situation we are in, letting us see it from a new perspective.

One of the things gripping many of us – perhaps *most* of us - during this pandemic is fear. We are afraid of getting the virus, or afraid of even being *exposed* to the virus. We are afraid that someone among our circle of family or friends will get the virus, or someone who has the virus will die. Or we are afraid that *all the precautions* taken to *prevent* the spread of the virus are going to ruin us financially.

Like the disciples gathered together in a room with the doors locked, we are afraid of things beyond our control. But there, in that locked room of fear, is precisely where the Risen Christ cuts into our world. And the Christ who appears is not one miraculously whole again. No, the Christ who comes to them first greets them with “peace” – and then shows them his wounds. This wounded Christ, whom Thomas names as Lord and God, is one who *knows* our fears, who *meets us in* our fears, and who speaks to us “Peace.” *And then shows us his wounds.*

Here is the word of the Lord: If you want to see God in all this, if you are looking for the Risen Christ, you will recognize him by his wounds. We will find God present in the woundedness of these days.

And it’s true, is it not? Precisely where the most wounded are, in the hospital ICU units overflowing with COVID patients, there the hands and feet of Christ are caring for those people – caring medically, certainly – but also bringing in an iPhone so a patient’s family can see their loved one, holding someone’s hand so they do not die alone, sleeping in a rented room or a camper van so they don’t take the virus home to their own families. The wounded Christ appears to those who feel isolated when a parishioner’s card or phone call arrives to remind them, they are *not* totally alone.

It is the wounded Christ who, at Max and Emily's – when they can't pay their own water bill – still feeds anyone who comes to the door and needs a meal. In all these moments, we are hearing a word from the Lord. The eternal is cutting into the temporal. God is with us in our woundedness.

Often, we hear people talk of seeing God in the beauty of nature. That, too, is a word from the Lord. Wonderful poems and music and art flow from awareness and appreciation of God's beauty. But we do not have to ignore our fear, or hide from the wounds. In today's gospel, John invites us to see God *in* the wounds, to hear a word from the Lord *in the time in which we live*.

Between the time Jesus shows the disciples his wounds and his second appearance a week later when he shows those same wounds to Thomas, John inserts his version of Pentecost: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

It is ironic, of course, that in this Gospel, Jesus *breathes* on the disciples – when we are so aware in this time of how contagious this virus is, how easily it may be spread even by our exhalation of breath. But there is a word from the Lord here, as well. This Spirit which Jesus breathes on the disciples – and on us – *can* be as contagious as COVID-19.

Perhaps one of the things this virus is revealing to us is that each of us has an incredible capacity to spread things. Even without our knowing, even if we are without symptoms, we can pass onto someone else something we are carrying. And we can pick up something from other people, or from objects, or from the very air if it has been tainted. So, what do we want to be carriers of? What do we want to spread? - and what should I really be avoiding if I don't want the virus of hatred or divisiveness to take hold in my person or to be passed on by my presence? Sometimes the word of the Lord comes as a question.

Is there any word from the Lord? Yes, yes there is. Tillich says, “It is not easy to keep oneself open for a word from the Lord. And nobody can make it easier for us by giving us the direction in which to listen. No fixed place can be named, either in our religious tradition or in our cultural creations, or in the depth of our souls. But for this very reason, no place is excluded from communicating to us a word from the Lord.... Therefore, let us keep open our ears and let us keep open our hearts, and ask with great seriousness and great passion: Is there a word from the Lord, a word for me, here and now, a word for our world in this moment? It is there, it tries to come to you. Keep open for it!”

Amen.

- [Acts 2:14a,22-32](#)
- [1 Peter 1:3-9](#)
- [John 20:19-31](#)
- [Psalm 16](#)