

Lectionary B June 28, 2015 Pentecost 5
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church
Evansville, IN

Lamentations 3:22-33
Psalm 30
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

A Risk of Faith

“It’s all about love.” That’s what Mary Moore said Wednesday during Bible study. She was talking about all the readings for today. We start out with Lamentations. *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;”* This promised love that never ends is the stuff that keeps the Psalm writer going when everything seems to be heading the wrong way. *“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”*¹

I read this just after listening to the eulogy Pres. Obama gave at Clementa Pinkney’s funeral. It reminded me of the families of those nine people whose lives were taken and the trust they had in God’s steadfast love. This angry young man had a plan. He said he wanted to cause havoc, he wanted to stir up hatred and anger between races. President Obama said, *“the killer likely assumed he would deepen divisions that trace back to our nation’s original sin.”*

He went on saying, *“But God works in mysterious ways. God had different ideas. He didn’t know he was being used by God.”*

“The alleged killer could have never anticipated the way the families of the fallen would respond when they saw him in court in the midst of unspeakable grief.”

*The country, the President argued, has responded to the church shooting “with a thoughtful introspection and self-examination that we so rarely see in public life.”*²

Oh, Lord, God, *“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”*³

Through the tears in Charleston, we are seeing something the killer planned for evil turning into the beginning real healing for this nation. His act of hatred has caused the whole nation to really look at the disease of racism that has plagued these United States for so many long years. And like the woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve long years—have we, together as a nation, gotten the courage to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus’ robe? Can we feel the power of healing beginning to flow through the Body of Christ?

¹ NRSV

² <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/27/politics/obama-eulogy-clementa-pinckney/index.html>

³ NRSV

When I looked up our Gospel lesson in the Message Bible, at the moment when the woman told Jesus she had touched his clothing, Jesus told her, *“Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”*⁴

Are we ready to trust God’s steadfast love and take a risk of faith? That risk means reaching out to Jesus knowing full well the nature of our disease. That is what this woman did. Her hemorrhage was likely a female reproductive ailment, which means that bleeding made her unclean in the eyes of the Jewish religion. Why, just being in that crowd, with the danger of contaminating anyone she bumped into was a huge risk. And she brought her uncleanness right to the skirts of Jesus’ robe. Reaching, hoping to only brush against him by a thread. Her faith in his steadfast love is what caused Jesus to feel the power of healing rush from his being.

Are we ready to own the seriousness of the disease of racism and bigotry as a nation? Are we now ready to take a risk of faith and expose our affliction for all to see, reaching out by a thread for Christ’s healing?

Wait!—there’s something else happening. Just like in our Gospel lesson, I don’t believe it is a coincidence that there were two things going on at the same time.

In the Gospel it was Jairus’ daughter. She was dying. Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, came to Jesus, *“My dear daughter is at death’s door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live.”* It was in following Jairus that the crowd surrounded Jesus and his clothing was “touch” by this desperate women. Did her touch delay Jesus, or was this all exactly the way God wanted it to be? Because, Jairus’ friends stopped them. *“Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?”* Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, *“Don’t listen to them; just trust me.”*

This week, at the same time the funerals of the nine slain in Charleston were happening, another history making event was brewing in Washington DC. So long has the LGBT community been faced with the death of their rights. Many times it seemed impossible. They had been told over and over, why bother anymore? Death was suffered many times over. But there was a risk of faith. *“Don’t listen to them; just trust me.”* At the same time Confederate flags were coming down in South Carolina and elsewhere, marriage equality became a reality throughout the country. Prejudice no longer rules. Jesus’ garment has been touched. Healing power is flowing throughout the Body of Christ. *“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”*

The President talked about Grace, how it is not earned or merited. How we are all sinners who receive this gift of God’s grace because God loves us with a never-ending steadfast love. Through this love we are able to see where we’ve been blind. We are free to open our hearts to reach out with generous love to others. That is what Paul is saying in our 2Corinthians text. *“Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you —so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking...For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich ”*⁵

⁴ Message Bible

⁵ NRSV

The President spoke of the generous role of the church, specifically the black church throughout history. *“Over the course of centuries, black churches served as “hush harbors” where slaves could worship in safety; praise houses where their free descendants could gather and shout hallelujah -- rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad; bunkers for the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. They have been, and continue to be, community centers where we organize for jobs and justice; places of scholarship and network; places where children are loved and fed and kept out of harm's way, and told that they are beautiful and smart -- and taught that they matter. That's what happens in church.”*⁶

And it was no coincidence that Friday night in this sanctuary many of us gathered with our own youth to watch the movie Selma. We were instructed to watch the movie with two questions in mind. “Where did we see faith?” “And what was the role of the church?” We saw the risk of faith in action as Martin Luther King Jr. lead the cause for the right to vote for every citizen of the United States. We witnessed him listening to God when everyone thought he was wrong. We could almost hear Jesus say, *“Don’t listen to them; just trust me.”*

We saw how the church was their safe haven, their place to meet and pray for God’s will. And one of our own people Friday evening said it just as powerfully as Obama did. She said, “The church is our backbone.”

Our children Friday night were shown how the risk of faith works. They were shown that church is a place where we come to the cross of Jesus to pray for healing and where we celebrate God’s gift of Grace through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Through this event they were given the message by the adults in their church that they are beautiful and smart and—that they matter.

And I pray that they learn to reach to Jesus’ garment continually as they grow and live in God’s generous undeserved love. They are our future. As they grow and reach out to Jesus taking the risk of faith our nation has real hope for healing. Yes, Mary is right. It is all about the amazing steadfast love of God. Amen

⁶<http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/27/politics/obama-eulogy-clementa-pinckney/index.html>