

Homily

October 18, 2020

The Reverend Rex McKee

We celebrate today the feast day of Saint Luke. Luke was a gentile, from Antioch, educated, Greek speaking, and it is said that he was a physician. He probably was one of Paul's cohort missionaries in the early witness of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Luke is identified as the writer of the Gospel of Luke, Acts of the Apostles, and scholars believe that he contributed to several of Paul's letters particularly the letter to the Hebrews.

Luke probably had not met Jesus, but knew of him through Phillip and Peter and the early gospel writers Matthew, Mark and other early writings. Historians believe that Luke had direct access to several of the early disciples, and perhaps even to Mary the mother of Jesus.

Luke was a prolific writer, contributing over 30% of the writing in the New Testament. There are over 25 stories that would not have been known to us if Luke had not included them in his gospel: for example the birth of Jesus foretold, the birth of John the Baptist, the mission of the 70, the Good Samaritan, the parable of the rich fool, the parable of the lost coin, the parable of the lost son; Without the Acts of the Apostles there is little we would know of the early Church, particularly in Jerusalem.

Today's Gospel repeats a customary reading from the Torah, a tradition dating back to the time of Moses. Jesus stood on the bimah, a platform where the Torah is read, with two attendants which we might know as an acolyte to assist and a clergy person to represent the synagogue. The Torah Portion for this day was from Isaiah chapter 61, as we heard....

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..

Jesus reading Isaiah continues....

comfort all who mourn,
rebuild the ancient ruins;
renew ruined cities,
Foreigners will stay and shepherd your sheep,
strangers will be your farmers
We will feed on the wealth of nations,
I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and dishonesty.^[c]
I will faithfully give them their wage,
All who see them will recognize that they are a people blessed by the LORD.

Jesus pronounces the words of healing, justice, and resilience that God promises in the words of Isaiah. A God of justice for all, a God who desires goodness and mercy for all people. Isaiah made the remarkable assertion that the promise of God to the people after the exile was not about their land or their nationhood but specifically about the outpouring of God's loving spirit upon the people. God's inclusive nature is clear as we understand the recipients of God's justice. 4 specific groups of people receive special mention as the object of God's love and mercy: widows, orphans, the poor, and aliens. They constitute the powerless in

society then, and now, the widows have no husbands, the orphans no parents, the poor no money, and the strangers no roots or relatives in the land.

Modern theologians remind us of the importance of this and related prophetic passages: Karl Barth writes that 'God always takes stand unconditionally on this side against the lofty, on behalf of the lowly and against those who already enjoy right and privilege. Reinhold Niebuhr writes that there is a bias in favor of the poor, that justice always leans towards mercy for those lacking power. John Rawls in Theory of Justice argues that these inequalities are to be arranged so that they are the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, based fundamentally on the biblical principle that God's prophets repeatedly voice concern for the poor and victims of injustice and oppression.

Last week Lisa introduced the brilliant work of Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmothers Hands*, specifically related to the physical and historical effects of trauma. Resmaa writes that White Supremacy is always functioning in our bodies... it operates in our lizard brain, it causes to fear and hate whatever the lizard brain feels will do us harm. For non-white Americans, recipients of hundreds of years of this racist behavior through abusive systems, structures, institutions or culture has impacted human genetics, and the traumas are experienced at the level of DNA.

Walter Brueggemann in his recent book *Truth Speaks to Power*, references the work of Robert Lifton, psychiatrist and historian, and his work on political mind control and the genetic impact on human consciousness. Brueggemann writes:

The present concentration of power and wealth among us, the collusion of much of the media, and the alliance of the courts make it possible to think that Lifton's totalizing research is ready at hand among those of us who attend to and mean to adhere to the testimony of truth in the biblical tradition.

We are called to pivot from the healing promise and vision of Isaiah and the prophets, through Jesus, to our personal and communal commitment today to share power with the powerless, and to commit to healing both ourselves and our victims of the systems and behavior of racism.

Resmaa provides us an understanding of the power of human resilience, through his clinical observation and research:

resilience is both intrinsic and learned it is a combination of nature and nurture.

resilience manifest itself both individually and collectively. Resilience not only comes from inside, but from those in our communities that cheer us on.

resilience is not limited to moving through a difficult time. It is more about being and just doing.

Resilience helps us to stay grounded, it enables us to protect ourselves over time.

It is our source of curiosity, possibility and energy that moves us through the world.

Resilience does not require that we carry pain and trauma on our shoulders.

The reading from Sirach gives us promise, and a path to resilience.... God's works will never be finished; and from him health spreads over all the earth.

We are called to be workers in God's master plan and commitment to justice, becoming the beloved community. We are likewise called by the Holy Spirit to keep moving, not to get stuck in our trauma but to practice resilience.

In all three of the synoptic Gospels it is written that if a people do not welcome you, and share your peace and love, shake the dust off of our feet as a witness against them. Now is an acceptable time for us to shake the dust of our behavior, our sins, and our trauma and move on and practice resurrection entering the Beloved Community promised by God in the voice of the prophets, Isaiah, Luke and Jesus.

I am now going to play a video of the Oregon Poet Laureate, Anis Mojgani, reading from his poem Shake the Dust. Bishop Prior introduced this poem to me over a decade ago, and I have come to love his poetry. Settle your hearts and minds for a moment, and imagine Anis as a prophetic voice, perhaps speaking from a contemporary Torah, a modern Isaiah, reminding us of God's love, resilience, and heart of justice.