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Sermon

Palm/Passion Sunday

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We have just been on a very intense journey! We have celebrated Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and then been brutally confronted with all that happened afterwards, right up to the sealing of the tomb and the apparent end of his ministry. It hasn't been easy! To be lifted up with joy and hope with the procession of palms only to be dashed down into tragedy and a radical sense of injustice, cruelty, and profound loss. How do we cope with this? How do we make sense of this? How do we make sense of these kinds of experiences when they show up in our lives?

I think there's only one answer that works. Loving-kindness. We have to make loving-kindness the bedrock of our lives. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama did that and became beloved friends with each other, showing us all how that's done. And when you have someone who's a dear, dear friend, who makes sense to you, and you make sense to them. Somebody who makes your heart light up when you see them. Who makes you laugh, laughs with you, cries with you, brings tears to your eyes when they're suffering... Then life is a lot easier.. And actually life is richer, more meaning-filled. And I think loving-kindness is the bedrock quality of a friendship like that. Clearly it was with Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. It's so essential.

And it's most essential at all those times when you feel the least loving or the least loveable, when your personal reservoir of loving-kindness is at an all-time low. We can hardly be expecting ourselves to give it out when we don't have any left for ourselves. It's at times like that that taking care of ourselves is crucial. It might be as simple as asking someone we trust for a hug. It might be as simple as going for a walk with a person you feel at home with. Or it might be as simple as sitting down with your dog or cat and allowing them to heal you and fill your reservoir with their great big hearts. It's crucial for each one of us to have a lexicon, a library of ways that we can refill our reservoir of loving-kindness when we notice it's getting low.

And it's easy to notice when it's getting low. Different things use it up. Sometimes we use it by giving and giving and giving for others. Sometimes we use it up when we encounter a situation in our lives that is full of unknowns and is scary as all get-out, and we don't really know where we are going to end up. We don't know if we'll have enough stamina or courage or wisdom to sail through, or even to stumble through sometimes. And it might be only in hindsight that we can look back and see - we actually were on the path the whole time we believed ourselves locked in darkness.

Mary Oliver wrote a short poem on that as she travelled the grief journey. It's called

The Uses of Sorrow.

Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand
that too was a gift.

What else depletes our reservoir? Grief. When we're on the big grief journey because someone who's been very dear to us and as close to as breath itself is gone. That uses up a lot of our reservoir of loving-kindness. Coping with a serious illness, especially when we're unsure of the outcome, uses up a lot of our reservoir of loving-kindness. Still, do you remember from last week the quote from Kahlil Gibran when the people asked The Prophet to tell them about joy and sorrow? Remember how he said the deeper your sorrow carves you the more joy you're capable of holding? That is one little piece of information that can help to fill our reservoirs or can make it a little easier to cope with those times when our reservoirs are low. Really we each need to have ways at hand to refill our reservoir. And if we can't think of any, we can ask for help. One of the three essential prayers. Help. We can ask for help from Jesus. Ahh! We can ask for help from our friends. We can ask for help from our priest. Because it's never good for anyone to go along with their reservoir depleted and nothing happening to refill it. It might be easier to notice someone else struggling than to acknowledge our how do we know they're struggling? Because they snap at us. Or they're impatient with others. Or they talk about how awful someone else is being towards them.... And for ourselves? Things that happen might feel so deeply wrong. Or just unbearable. They're a mirror, my friends. Say 'thank you.' And we might wonder - what is the meaning of this!

And then years later we might look back and go "Ahhh!" I bet that's happened to you. We have to look back to get the 'ahh!'. I think with curiosity. And an open heart. And the it's the open-hearted questions that transform the journey from slog to pilgrimage. It's Holy Curiosity that allows us to be graced with in-sight and the possibility of transformation. Because we are indeed each on this sacred journey. Individually. And as a parish. We're on a pilgrimage. And one of the big the purposes of a pilgrimage is to come closer to God. I *was* going to invite you but I've decided to challenge you. I challenge you to look at our situation as a parish, to not just look but to find, find the ways in which this situation is bringing us closer to God. Or has the potential to. If we step forward willingly, with open hearts.

I believe it's called surrendering to God. It's challenging. Really challenging. Some days it feels impossible. And other days we have hope. So there's the journey. There's our open-hearted questions. And there's God. Cause isn't that why we're here? Remember? It's all about God at work among us. Remember God? Yeah! That's why we're here. So we ask God. Maybe like this: "God? What's up with this?!?" Or maybe we say it like this, "Oh. My. God. I don't believe this." A little bit of resistance in that response perhaps! or it could be put like this, " Ok, Lord. I surrender." And I say if we're able to say that as a parish, if we're able to come together and together say, "Ok, Lord, we surrender. Show us the way", amazing things will happen. Hang on to your hats because that will be the ride of your life! Thanks be to God. Can I get an 'amen'?