

The Courage to Speak God's Shalom

July 3, 2022 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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Texts: Luke 10: 1-11

Good Morning First Church on this hazy summer Sunday. The past couple of weeks I've found a need for prayer and pause more than ever- for prayer to speak through the anger, the weariness, to acknowledge the hunger for a world full of the justice, mercy, and compassion of Jesus. Maybe you too have needed prayer and pause to pull you out of a swirl of worthy worries and into a mind and heart that has room for hope. From a fascist hate group marching the streets of Boston yesterday, to the EPA being limited in reducing pollution to fight climate change, to the American academy of pediatrics having to release a statement about the grave consequences of children being forced to give birth, to the ongoing violence in Ukraine there is so much to hold. I invite us to pray together in the midst of community A Prayer for the Tired, Angry Ones by Laura Jean Truman

God, We're so tired.

*We want to do justice, but the work feels endless,
and the results look so small in our exhausted hands.*

*We want to love mercy, but our enemies are relentless,
and it feels like foolishness to prioritize gentleness in this unbelievably cruel world.*

*We want to walk humbly, but self-promotion is seductive,
and we are afraid that if we don't look after ourselves,
no one else will.*

We want to be kind, but our anger feels insatiable.

Jesus, in this never-ending wilderness,

come to us and grant us grace.

Grant us the courage to keep showing up to impossible battles, trusting that it is our commitment to faithfulness,

and not our obsession with results, that will bring in Your peace.

Grant us the vulnerability to risk loving our difficult and complicated neighbor, rejecting the lie that some people

are made more in the image of God than others.

Grant us the humility of a de-centered but Beloved self.

As we continue to take the single step that is in front of us, Jesus, keep us from becoming what we are called to transform.

Protect us from using the empire's violence—in our words,

in our theology, in our activism, and in our politics—

for Your kingdom of peace.

Keep our anger from becoming mean-ness.

Keep our sorrow from collapsing into self-pity.

Keep our hearts soft enough to keep breaking.

Keep our outrage turned towards justice, not cruelty.

Remind us that all of this, every bit of it, is for love.

Keep us fiercely kind.

Amen.

Thank you for praying with me words that aren't merely empty pleas but are spoken into the world such that they compel us to act in alignment with them and with the Spirit.

This morning we find ourselves in the middle of the Gospel of Luke with a story about how followers of Jesus were preparing communities for his arrival. Jesus sends about 70 people out to alert neighboring towns that he was planning on visiting and he sends them out rather unprepared. He says to them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the

laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.10:3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.10:4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.” 10:5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'”

A pretty bleak way to be sent on a journey to prepare folks for Jesus who is coming their way. No place to carry any supplies or back up plans, no protection from the road for tender feet. These followers of Jesus are told before they even get to the towns that they are lambs being sent into the arms of wolves, ostensibly to be met with a violent end. Sounds like something not to look forward to at all. This section of Luke often is interpreted to be focusing on the themes of hospitality and cultivating peace. Understandably because the next instructions include the followers being asked to bless the homes they enter with peace and the strangers living in the homes welcoming these ministers to stay and eat with them so that they can carry out the work that Jesus requires of them.

The contemporary idea of peace often is associated with a lack of conflict and a calmness but knowing the larger context of the gospel of Luke and this gospel author's motivation to uplift the stories of those who are marginalized, to point to unexpected places where the kingdom of God resides, that definition felt uninteresting to me. Of course, the word read as peace here is from the Hebrew word Shalom, meaning amongst other things wholeness, welfare, safety, restoration and rest. Later on, in the text it is

declared “the kingdom of God has come near.” It is often assumed that the healing of the sick and other assumed actions are what brings that kingdom near, but I wonder if the kingdom of God shows up in the moments we prioritize wholeness, safety and rest with community, nourishing one another for the hard work ahead. What if the Kingdom of God was present in the breaking of bread, in the courage it takes to speak the hope of wholeness and safety and rest into a world that we are not quite prepared to confront, sandless and weary from the journey carrying any supplies in our hands? What if the Kingdom of God resides in the wisdom of nourishment and the knowledge that we will try again tomorrow and the next day and the next to bring about goodness and mercy in our world?

As I was sitting outside with family yesterday thinking to myself I should probably be doing something other than resting, I came across a video of this woman standing out on a patch of grass on a sunny day. She said “When every other healing technique fails, do lizard time, every time. I was initially confused, thinking- what the heck does that mean? But quickly it became clear. She laid down on the sun-soaked grass, very much like a lizard needs to do to regulate their body temperature, her eyes closed. With a deep sigh she says, “It’s fine. It will be fine. Everything will be fine.” She opens her eyes and then abruptly she says to the camera “also a part of lizard time- you can do a couple of push-ups just to like posture because you know when lizards see each other they bounce up and down and say “I’m strong. I’m ok I got this- this is my area” but mainly I just lay

here.” I love that this woman described this practice of grounding and rest and yes, faith, as a healing technique. That not only rest, but an acknowledgment of our strength as we rest is an act of healing, bringing about God’s shalom in the world and in our hearts.

This practice reminds me of Julian of Norwich’s prayer, “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” Sometimes yes, bringing the kingdom of God near means putting our rage to good use, calling our representatives for climate change legislation, volunteering to escort a patient into a women’s health clinic with compassion past threatening protesters, signing people up to exercise their right to vote to protect our democracy, or donating to the food pantry. But sometimes when we come from the path, weary and looking for a place to lay our heads, the kingdom of God is near in our commitment to having faith in wholeness, safety and rest and sharing the gentleness of that good news with everyone we can. God, we pray, keep us fiercely kind to ourselves and to others and keep our faith and foundation in you, our hope and our healing, our shalom. Amen.