

Resource

February 12, 2023 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

A Reflection by Rev. Daniel A. Smith

Texts: James 5: 12-17

Words of genuine encouragement rarely need much interpretation and this passage from James is no exception. In this short letter, he asks a few basic questions of his community that takes them and us straight to the heart. The simplicity of the questions is only outdone about the refreshingly clear-cut instructions about what we can do with these questions. They should lean go to the elders of the church, in our case these our newly ordained and installed Deacons. They should be anointed with oil! Leave it to the brother of Jesus to be so matter of fact about such things. Friends, James's words, and the ritual we are about to we share, are resources. Resources for you and me, and we need them now as ever.

I've been thinking a lot about this word "resource" lately. I attended a workshop about trauma amongst other things. Something that was shared at the start has stayed with me. It came after a powerful land acknowledgment - a creation-and-all-that-is-in-it acknowledgement, really - led by a Canadian Indigenous woman. After that, it was a time of communal grounding, of settling in, and preparing our hearts for the heavy materials we were about to consider together. The workshop leader next said this, as if to reflect on what we just experienced and to look ahead. He said: 'before there was [pain], before there was trauma, before there was oppression, there was resource.' It landed as a remarkable gift. Indeed, before, during and after whatever events that may shake us to the core, even those that quake the earth itself, there was, there is, and I believe there always will be *resource*.

As we hear questions like those of James, as we prepare for to this time of healing prayer and to sign our gentle hymns, I offer this as a reminder and invitation. There was and is resource, and there's a deep, deep well for us, right here.

Yesterday, I came across a poem which echoes the theme. It's called "In the Deepest Night" by Myrline Sanogo-Mathieu.

*In the depths...
I thought of you.
In those moments when the madness of the world overwhelms it.
I wonder what truth we don't grasp,
Which from afar frightens you and for us saddens you.
I thought of you yesterday,
In the contagious panic that crushes our guts,
I try to remember your soothing words,
Which with great tenacity would silence my anxieties.
I thought of you again,
When the silence around me became cumbersome,
Like a coup with no weapons, no stir,
Yet so full of sparkle!
Tonight, I still think of you,
You, source of me,*

*I who feel you living in me,
 You who gave me life,
 I will always think of you!
 And I now am thinking of you!*

Resource! Sometimes we may need just a few moments to tap into it, a ½ second even, to ground, orient and find that resource. You, the Spirit, an ancestor, a bird song, a look up at the blue sky of the morning, a look down at our feet on the ground. I've found myself needing to resource myself more than usual his past week, and gratefully, it's been there. Even in the face of an incomprehensible death toll with over 36,000 lives lost in Turkey and Syria and hundreds of thousands of homeless, including many who were already living in refugee camps... In the face of the ongoing impact of those incomprehensible acts of violence against Tyre Nichols and Sayed Faisal... In the midst of a still somehow incomprehensible loss of our beloved member and leader Hilary Hopkins... Like many of you I know, I have been thinking about her every day, and yet sometimes when I think of her it's not just with deep grief; I've been finding resource there, too, in subtle prompts of her wisdom and courage!

Speaking of which, I heard Ayanna Pressley give a powerful address yesterday at the Cambridge NAACP Brunch. She shared her response when people ask her: 'don't you grow weary and lose hope in the fight and struggle, being a Black woman in congress and in this country?' She said I tell them "I don't have the luxury. I can't afford to!" Amen, I thought! Neither do any of us! She had earlier told us about and gave thanks for her resources - her husband, her community, for a time St Paul's AME in Central Sq., her ancestors.

The fact is whatever temporary comforts, busy distractions, self-care strategies, therapy (and thank God for that), vacations or time-off, whatever we may or may not be able to afford when times are hard, these are inadequate to deal with the challenges we face in our individual and collective lives. We need deeper, ongoing resource that was, is and always will be there for us.

And so, we offer this time, as resource for whatever you may be holding. It's a time to let that ever living, ever breathing, ever loving Spirit that was and is in all creation, that lives in us now, be a resource and hold you now.

We will now offer a time of blessing and consolation, an opportunity to come to one of our healing stations as the front or back of the church. This is a time to share briefly and confidentially with our teams whatever you are holding now. A chance to receive a gentle word, a touch of soothing oil, a reassuring hand— all signs of God's gifts of peace and hope, all resources. If you choose instead to remain seated, that's more than fine. You may take in the quiet and the music. You may pray for the world, for others, and for yourselves.

Whether you remain seated or come forward, whether you ask aloud or silently within your hearts, God knows your need, and God comes to us all with hope and healing and peace. Amen!