

“LETTING THIS TIME GO THROUGH YOU”

Acts 2:41-47

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So, how's it going with you? How is it REALLY going? Maybe you're one of the families who are posting hilarious TIK TOKS on Instagram about your life together (If you don't know what a tik tok is, ask any teenager or young adult); Maybe your family is making thousands of masks and PPE or are giving weekly to the food bank which has been in great need; maybe you all have treasured this time with generations together as a way to reconnect in a way which only would have seemed impossible only a few months ago;

And maybe you are not any of those things... maybe you've been stuck alone in your apartment, assisted living space or home and are really lonely, longing for human connection and touch.

Maybe you have had it with homeschooling and are still trying to get the rhythm of childcare while trying to work a job all on zoom or on the phone;

Maybe you and your spouse, normally accustomed to lots of space during the day when at work... have suddenly seen some of the challenges to your communication styles, and it's been difficult to work things through.

Maybe your own emotions are overwhelming you, and it's been difficult to stay balanced.

Wherever you are, whatever you're experiencing... it's ok. God is there with you, just as God is here with me.

We are in this strange time when everything we have gone to in the past to distract us, has been removed. We're in the midst of trauma which has wrapped itself around the globe and into the minds of every living being wreaking havoc in our lives. And in the timeline of it all, the novelty has worn off... We want to get back to our lives... to what we consider NORMAL—whatever that was for you and me.

But the reality is, and what is dawning on many of us now, is that normal... at least in the way we once knew it, may not ever be the same. And that's a loss which is settling in for many of us.

Last week, I participated in a Zoom conference with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, or PDA, as they are known. We know them because some of our One Great Hour of Sharing dollars go to fund the efforts of our connectional church when there are disasters such as hurricanes, floods and even shootings. They did a tremendous amount of work for example with our congregations near Sandy Hook after the school shooting there.

PDA is currently assisting people in our denomination with this crisis—COVID-19; Their mental health experts are helping us realize that this trauma is just as impactful as any other disaster.

If you're on our email distribution list, you've received a link with the 4 stages in the timeline of disaster which PDA delineates:

1. The first stage comes right after the disaster begins: it's characterized by a sort of emotional high; people act with much heroism; there's great hopefulness, some of which is fueled by adrenaline;
2. During the second stage, people experience an emotional drop characterized by despair and hopelessness. Some may

feel that things will never get better. There will be some emotional and spiritual slide;

3. Then comes some sort of bottom;

4. Followed by a fourth stage which lasts for some time of finding some sort of stasis again... some sort of new normal; it's a slower period and it's jagged with ups and downs; It could take several years.

This model they presented helped me identify some of the swings which I have been experiencing as I have navigated through this pandemic so far. My question to the presenters was, how do you lead others who may be at differing points of the timeline?

Their answer was to be gentle with yourself... and that every stage is ok for that moment in time; it's a call to be present to others where they are. That's a challenge.

That brings me to our scripture lesson this morning. Once again, I'm amazed at how the lectionary text is so right on with what we need to hear. It's so relevant.

The text from the book of Acts... about the early church in around 60 or 70 AD could have been written today...

Believers were huddled together; they devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles; they distributed what they had to those in need; they broke bread together at home and ate with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having goodwill to all.

There was a communal spirit of generosity among them that there was enough—in fact there was more than enough, and they shared. Two chapters later, as the message spread, the scriptures say they shared their faith with great power – and great grace was upon them all. There

was not a needy person among them—in fact landowners sold their properties and gave the money to the leadership so that everyone had what they needed. It is a beautiful image of the church at its best... being and doing what Jesus taught them to do—to care for all.

And then, as my colleague Nate reminds me... the next chapters, the reality of human frailty emerges and there are problems; humanity sets in and not everything was so rosy.

But as I thought about it some more... I realized those early followers of the risen Christ most likely lived in traumatic times. They faced great persecution for sharing their faith. The apostle Stephen was stoned a few chapters ahead. They lived in fear, but they still were propelled forward. It's bound to have affected the ways they interacted with each other.

Are we surprised? No... they were human beings, just as we are. They and we are prone to rub up against each other and do things which protect ourselves and sometimes hurt others. And when we are in close spaces with a lot of togetherness, there's no wonder that problems are going to surface.

Last week's Gospel lesson told the story of the risen Christ appearing to the disciples on the night after the resurrection when they broke bread together.

There's something very human, very real about breaking bread, sharing a meal together. Our human needs and our spiritual needs come together and we are met by the risen Christ and made one body... even in all of our brokenness...

So what do we do, even as we cannot meet together still as a body of the church? We recognize, once again, that the Church has never been about the building. We know that in our congregation. It's about being God's

wider community. We refocus to see God in each other and in the daily functions of life.

Dr. Gregory Popcak, a psychotherapist from the Catholic tradition, writes that while we meet God in the Daily Mass at church, we also meet him in the Domestic Mess at home. God's grace "allows us to be transformed by doing little acts of family life with great love; wiping noses, drying tears, drawing pictures, playing games, calming fears."

<http://catholicexchange.com/holy-family-in-the-pots-and-pans>

These days are beyond difficult... some of us wonder how we are going to make it through this day, holding on by a thread, as one person phrased it this week. Others may still have a little reserve to be able to reach out to tomorrow when they will need some help then.

Where are YOU this day? Do you need a (physical or virtual) touch, or can you reach out and be the one who offers grace and love and peace to someone else today?

A colleague of mine in one of my earlier churches had experienced trauma when he was in seminary. One summer his wife died, a year into their marriage and then next year, both his parents died in a plane crash. I remember him telling the story... he said he had a choice... he could continue and go through seminary, or he could let seminary go through him... allowing the process to change him and shape who he was.

We have that choice with this as well. To go through it or to let it go through us... listening to how God is present, wanting to shape and mold us in this time. And As a community we will figure out together what we'll be and how we'll be. We'll need to ask each other for forgiveness and offer it as well... but make no mistake... the Risen Christ is here with us, offering us peace... a peace which will sustain us.

Popcak says: "We don't need to escape our homes to find God and sanctity. We don't need to run away from home to pray. We need to follow Christ's example, and empty ourselves, entering more deeply into the mystery of the domestic mess and finding the wholeness and holiness that waits for us there."

May it be so, Alleluia! Amen~