

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 5, 2020
Pastor Tamika Jancewicz
DE-MD Synod Sunday Worship Service**

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 Sermon

I don't know about y'all but I'm feeling very weighed down today.

2020 has been a whole lot and we're only halfway through it. We're still in the thick of many things. And naming all of the troubles of our time would warrant a bold Trigger Warning to preface each bullet point of items on our list of woes.

This. Is. A. Lot.

And on top of that. It's also very noisy.

The clashing of voices trying to yell over one another is loud, and it often can cause confusion and clouded judgment. We are being inundated with information, solutions, and opposing points of view. Everyone is right, and so many are wrong all at the same time.

This isn't new, quite honestly, but with everything else going on, it just seems louder somehow in 2020.

But when we hear these words from Jesus as he is teaching and proclaiming his message to those in the cities he is traveling through, we can rest assured this noise--a cacophony of voices--is something we share with generations of people across the centuries.

Let's hear Jesus' words this morning once more:

*But what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace and calling at one another,
'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
We wailed, and you did not mourn.*

The voices singing songs *at* one another, unable to hear one another to the point where instead of any song happening, they are missing the opportunity to experience the true beauty of both dancing to the sounds of the flute and healing *with* one another in the beautiful gift of communal lament and mourning.

And so it is, Jesus continues, that people are missing the opportunity to see the truth in who John the Baptist is and who he is. Instead, the identities of both John and Jesus are distorted and mislabeled. John is identified as a demon. And Jesus understood to be a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Many are asleep to what Jesus has come to offer because what he is saying and how he is doing it is not the way they imagine one would if they were from G-d. What is wise to them is foolishness and what is foolish to them, their eyes are closed to see the wisdom in.

And the noises of distractions and rightness become louder.

And what is missed in this type of noise?

An opportunity to experience the divine presence in and among. A chance for imaginations to be expanded in the holy and to participate in something outside of ourselves.

But wisdom will have her vindication by her deeds—deeds done through Jesus in great power.

And what deeds, what actions, did Jesus do?

He opened the eyes of those who wanted to see, he healed the bodies of those who were otherwise left out of society, he touched those considered untouchable, he opened the ears of those who wanted to hear, he raised people from the dead and gave a solemn word of good news to those whose only news at the time told them they did not belong and were not apart. Their identities being the very thing keeping them from society's gaze.

The inclusive ministry of Jesus was one that centered the voices of the margins--outcasts, sinners, people deemed unwanted and not apart. Amplifying the voices of those silenced by society and bringing them to the forefront.

A ministry from the margins, as we heard from Bishop Gohl last week.

This ministry did not center the powerful and those expected to have the wisdom, but wisdom came from those who were considered like the infants of their time, those who were vulnerable, humble, and disruptive.

And in centering such voices, Jesus is offering an opportunity for the cacophony to cease and the focus of ears to be attuned to the sounds that bring wholeness and fullness for everyone. A noise that is not so noisy, but still might have a sort of harshness for those of us unfamiliar at first to the notes. With these new sounds, we hear our shortcomings, but we receive a grace-filled offering that can bring us to a place of repentance and turning around.

A turning around that is not easy or quick, but one that brings a reckoning to the sins and evil before us. One that we can't un-see once we have seen, but the possibilities of what is on the other side of repentance are worth looking towards.

These songs sound like freedom and liberation if we could but listen. And each generation has brought their own rendition of it. In them, we hear the truth.

By the time you hear this, many of us would have celebrated the fourth of July. Some of us might have our own cookouts, and picnics with close family and friends (all with masks and appropriate social distancing). Some of us will take that deep breath of joy that is needed at this time. And it will all be in celebration of liberties and justice of forefathers who colonized here in these United States. Implications that are not to be dismissed.

And for some of us, the words of Frederick Douglas will be at the forefront of minds as we live through another Fourth of July. Douglas spoke to a group of his peers in the year 1852, when what we now know as the United States of America was only 76 years of age. In this speech, Douglas goes on to share in a hope that at

such a young age, America still had an opportunity to change. Still an opportunity to see and hear. Douglas wanted his fellow countrypersons to know that he knew his history. He understood why they celebrated. In their eyes, they were free from the tyranny of the British Empire. And also, in his courageous song of truth telling, he told his peers that this day was no celebration for him and people like him. Because while they were all celebrating freedom, and welcoming the neighbors who would travel here for the same freedoms, there were still people to whom freedom was not a reality. Freedom to be human in these United States. Slavery was still an ongoing enterprise. And during this time the Fugitive Slave Law had been in effect, so people who had found freedom in the North were still being hunted, brought back to plantations, or sold to the highest bidder. The yoke of slavery was still a reality, so to celebrate in a reality that was not one's own would be inauthentic and a lie. Here he was in the North, with people who thought they were on the right side of the argument, but their complacency and silence were just as noisy as the chains and bondage of slavery.

Douglas says in his speech:

The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, lowering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin! I can to-day take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people!

Siblings while we are not in 1852, we can still hear the songs of our ancestral ties. Douglas warned those there that the longer it would take to see the humanity of the silenced voices, the harder it would be to undo the death it was causing.

And today, we carry that burden, that weight of injustice. We are still seeing the fruits of the evil of our past. History is informing our present, but we are not beholden to these things in our future.

Once more we are given a chance to be a part of the imaginative work of the Holy Spirit that is singing a new song, offering up a better way. A song of liberation.

And in the midst of this hard reality that so many of us are still living in, Jesus urgently calls out to the weary and those carrying heavy burdens and offers respite. Once again putting our focus back to the margins of society. Leading us in a way that would make the load easier and the burden lighter.

To our BIPOC (especially our women), to our LGBTQIA+ siblings (especially our trans siblings), to our siblings living with disabilities, to our siblings who are home insecure, to our siblings who are poor and struggling, to our siblings who are fighting each day for a, “Come to me.” Jesus says. “I will give you rest.” You do not have to carry this burden alone.

This invitation might sound exclusive and foolish to the ears of those who are used to being at the center of the conversation. I imagine the people who were sitting before Douglas were surprised by his message, to say the least. They thought he might bring a more hopeful song to their ears, but what he brought instead was an all-encompassing hope for all people who lived within the context of his time. The song he shared was to open the ears of those who needed to hear about true freedom.

It is that same song that Jesus shares as he shows up time and time again accompanying our beloved siblings who are mistreated, misjudged--those carrying the heavy burden of oppression and marginalization. It's not exclusionary, but particular and inclusive in ways that we are set free and invited to live into.

This freedom allows us to be connected within our struggles. It calls us to the work that will not leave one behind in the cause. It's a yoke unlike any other. A lighter one that Jesus promises does not come with chains and captivity. No. Beloved, this place we find ourselves can be a time of true healing and peace. One that no longer

dismisses the suffering of our fellow humans and one that calls out the injustice of systemic oppressions.

Yea...it's hard not to feel the weight of it all. To be overwhelmed by the noises.

But the songs of liberation we hear in the midst remind us that G-d *is* present. And through these songs we experience the love of Jesus. A love that promises to be with us and that comes with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and we are invited to be in tune together to the voice that frees us all.

Thanks be to G-d. Amen