

Just in case I'm really boring,  
or say something so scandalous you stop listening-  
No matter who you are,  
no matter what you have done  
or what has happened to you in your life,  
**God's love for you in Jesus Christ is unconditional.**  
**And God invites you to live in that love.**  
Now, You've heard the Gospel,  
and we can all relax about me messing this up.

In "**unprecedented**" times like these,  
I love it when really terrible things happen in our Scripture lessons.  
Because they remind me  
that these times are not so unprecedented after all.  
God's people have lived through truly terrible things,  
And through it all, **God was faithful.**  
God made a way when there was no way.

So I've been drawn lately to Hebrew Scriptures.  
Not that there aren't storms in our Gospels,  
and not that the worst thing ever didn't happen near the end of them  
-more on that later-  
but because so much **wisdom for surviving faithfully**  
through family drama, plagues,  
through wilderness struggles,  
through really bad political situations is found in them:  
Feed each other, care for the sick,  
Tell each other the truth about our lives,  
And the stories of faith from the past.  
Because the holiest truth,  
Promised us over and over and over again,  
is that God is faithful to us.  
God has led people of faith though worse times than ours,

and God will lead us through these too.

Whether its interpersonal violence,  
Like the way Joseph's great-grandparents treated Hagar,  
Or political oppression,  
Like how Joseph's descendants will be treated by the Egyptians,  
Or deadly conflicts between brothers, like today's story,  
God's people have lived through terrible things.  
But **betrayal from siblings** is a unique hurt, isn't it?  
Even little conflicts between siblings, and siblings in Christ, are rough.  
I think about the conversations between my own loved ones,  
All of whom are concerned about coronavirus and take precautions,  
And the friction we feel when one of us evaluates risks  
Slightly differently than another of us.

And of course, many of us know far greater betrayals by siblings.  
And some of the worst ones come from **inside the church**.

**I know this** as a Queer person who felt a call to ministry before 2009,  
And I suspect there are many among you  
Who know it from being horrified to learn  
That women weren't considered fit for ordination  
more than 50 years ago.

Or know it from the way the church has treated you  
As people of color,  
The million micro, and macro aggressions.  
Or as survivors of spiritual abuse,  
Which the church didn't recognize, stop, or address.

**It hurts when siblings in Christ don't recognize  
The image of God in us.**

Tell us that the center of our being is sinful,  
Or that we aren't worthy of the church's protection, or blessings.  
And being told lies about there being something wrong with us

leads to our death, at the hands of our siblings.

Now, I don't know, now I'm going to start meddling,  
I wonder if anyone else has had this experience,  
That there's **one sibling who doesn't really want our \*death\***  
But just wants us to not be a problem anymore,  
Like Rueben, who thinks it's kind to *\*only\** put us in the pit.  
I wonder if any of you have ever been told,  
"I want you to live, but maybe be a little less Queer,  
**Be a little more "Lutheran,"**  
(like, white middle class Lutherans)  
Be a little less feminine, don't challenge us.  
Anyone who has ever been told it's better than death  
to be thrown into that kind of pit.  
Kept in that sort of closet,  
Closed in by those labels and stereotypes.  
(Dear Ones, it isn't the life God wants for your either.)

Or, I wonder if any of you know,  
(did you think I'd stop now?)  
About siblings like Judah,  
who want to **profit** from how you've been hurt,  
Siblings who want you in their churches just for numbers,  
Or money, or their own reputations,  
Siblings that don't care about your own well-being,  
But only about butts in the pews.  
(Beloveds, God wants better for you than that too.)

Dear Ones, so many of us have been harmed,  
By siblings in the church, or by others.  
So many broken relationships,

So many terrible things.  
So much hurt.

But beloveds, **God can turn that hurt around.**  
God can use it to bring goodness into our life.  
Just as God used what Joseph's brothers did for good.  
(Remember, Joseph saves them when famine comes.)

God doesn't cause the hurt so that good things happen.  
No! Not at all.  
God didn't want coronavirus to be ravaging our most vulnerable.  
God doesn't want police brutality,  
God didn't plan family violence,  
Or the rejection of our deepest, truest selves.  
God didn't do that. **Human sin did.**

But, but  
God can use human sin to bring goodness to the world.

How do I know?

Because the most terrible thing imaginable has already happened,  
and God turned it into good  
Because the worst that humans have ever done  
is something God took and made into our salvation.  
Because **we already killed God.**  
And God turned it into life  
Because we already crucified the Prince of Peace  
And God used it reconcile us to Godself.  
Because the death we gave Jesus,

God turned into Life.  
Because all of our hate  
**God takes and turns into infinite Love.**

So, Who will separate us from the love of Christ?  
Will economic hardship, or COVID, or Vision and Expectations, or social distancing,  
or Zoom fatigue, or doomscrolling, or murder hornets?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors  
through him who loved us.  
For I am convinced that neither death,  
nor life, nor white supremacy, nor homophobia,  
nor sexism, nor transphobia,  
nor elections, nor protests, nor port explosions,  
nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The God who spoke light and dark into being,  
The One who took dirt and shaped your nose and thighs,  
And breathed life into your very body,  
The God who chose a dysfunctional family to carry the promise,  
The God who heard the cries of enslaved Israelites,  
And brought them to freedom,  
The God who gave us laws to protect the vulnerable,  
and poets and prophets to remind us when we forgot,  
That God came in Jesus Christ,  
Is moving through the storms towards us,  
Will die for us and come again in bread and wine,  
To show us that Life is stronger than death,

Love is stronger than hate,  
And God's faithfulness is bigger than anything humans can do.  
Come, let's live in that love, together.