

“Deep Cries Out to Deep”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, Pastor, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA

Psalm 42:7

The psalmist said, “*Deep cries out to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*” Lord where will my help come from? Lord where is your face? When Moses, after leading his enslaved people out of Egypt, was tested day and night, facing certain death and then being told God is angry and will leave them there in the desert, Moses undoubtedly felt torn in two. In his own state of depression he asks to simply see God’s face, to find comfort in God’s presence. God says to Moses, “You can’t handle seeing my face.” So he was only permitted to see God’s back when God passed over the mountain while Moses hid in the cleft of the rock. Moses’ request was his own “deep crying out to deep.”

When there are no other words to express the anguish we feel, “deep cries out to deep.” All we want is to see our Comforter, to feel God’s presence in our lives, to know we aren’t alone. We often have no words when our “deep cries out to deep.” When the prophet Elijah courageously stood up for God’s commands and was suddenly facing death by a cruel queen and many of his fellow prophets and priests already slaughtered in the thousands, he barely escaped with his life. And while alone and depressed, holed up in a cave in the mountains, fearing for his very life—the Lord said to him “Come outside.” And there in his darkest hour when only “deep cries out to deep,” did God bring Elijah into a mutual presence of solace. Do you remember the story? And just like Moses, God was about to pass over the mountain. Elijah wanted to know that he was not alone, that the Lord his God was still with him, for he had felt so abandoned at that moment. So in a show of incredible might, gale force winds tore through the mountain, but do you remember— God wasn’t in the wind. Then the earth shook violently, but God wasn’t in the earthquake. Then massive flames of fire ripped all through the area, making Elijah even more afraid, but God wasn’t in the roaring fire. No. And after the fire dissipated, a whisper blows gently on Elijah’s ears. God spoke with a small, gentle whisper. God understood his deepest pain, his “deep crying out to deep,” and he answered that pain with a depth of connection, a comforting message: “I’m here.”

This week we saw something that many of us have not seen in this country before, not in our lifetime and not with that level of intentional hostility, intentionally visceral hate and disgust, laced with unequivocal tones of racism, but more importantly White Nationalism or White Supremacy. This idea of dominance through force, and the subjugation of those who ideologically differ is the polar opposite of our own understanding of inclusion—and it is diametrically opposed to Martin Luther King’s notion of the “beloved community.” Dr. King said, “*The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.*” “Love” is no easy word and many, largely white, churches this morning will be calling for calm and love, and calling for prayer (the standard go-to when we feel so paralyzed by events or

confused by politics). I too feel that our community will benefit from “love” and “prayer,” but I would also like to describe what “love” entails as shown to us through Jesus’ very life on this earth. This really isn’t a philosophical discussion or an esoteric debate about “what would Jesus do?” We can look at what Jesus *did* and surmise how to proceed in our own walk on this earth we call home, and how we can lead the way towards healing. Extending from last week’s lesson, how we can be “the tree.”

Jesus said, “Love others as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

Love without prejudice, unabashedly and unashamedly. It doesn’t matter who or what is happening, err on the side of love. When the Roman Centurion came to Jesus asking to heal his friend (some say servant, some say lover), Jesus did not hesitate; he recognized where “deep cries out to deep.” The Scripture says “he got up immediately to go” to heal him. This is how we ought to be, quick to action. No more thinking, no more processing, no more debating. We should be instantly jumping to the aid of others, even our enemies. The Roman Centurion was a pagan, living a lifestyle certainly not mainstream, and he represented a race and government that was oppressing his very people, but Jesus didn’t care about any of it. He put politics aside completely. Jesus saw only a human being in need and wanted to relieve his suffering. This is when “deep cries out to deep.”

Love the ugly. Our pains go beyond words, beyond expression. They are deep. Our needs are deep and often hidden from one another. When Jesus was to visit the Gerasenes he came across a man who was outcast living in the graveyard outside the town, who was naked and hurting himself daily, cutting himself with stones. He was tormented by demons we can’t imagine. Can you imagine what things haunted him, what trauma he must have gone through? He was desperate, at the breaking point, where “deep cries to deep,” and Jesus saw him and took the rest of his day with him alone. He healed him. We don’t know how, but he did. The change was so transformative that it scared the other villagers. Jesus saw death and brought hope of new life. Jesus forwent the masses for the sake of the one, the discarded sheep.

Love your persecutors. When Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he would be executed, Peter tried to defend Jesus, even cutting off one of the approaching men’s ears, and what did Jesus do? Without hesitation, without prejudice, putting politics aside, Jesus picked up the man’s ear and healed him. Jesus would continue the same strategy to the cross itself where he prayed on his executioners’ behalf, “Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do.” This is where “deep cries out to deep.”

White nationalism and faux-patriotic insurrectionism have no place in our Beloved Community. Arrogance, cynicism, and antagonism have no place in the Beloved Community. We must be bold in standing up for those who are persecuted. We must be urgent in reaction to aid others. We must be intentional in our steps as we step forward and we must heed the voices of those who are suffering the most where “deep cries out to deep” every minute of every hour of every day—the marginalized, the poor, and the destitute, for among them our “Jesus” still abides. Jesus said, “For what you do for those at the bottom, you do for me” (Matthew 25:40). The inverse could be said in this way, “For what you do for those at the top, you do for yourself.” Let us be a Beloved Community. Let us hear the depths of the

cries of the suffering, the pain from both our past and our present. And let us stand up and alongside those who truly suffer in our nation and somehow let us love all.