

C Holy Trinity 6.12.22

Psalm 8; John 16:12-15

Focus Statement: God is mindful of us.

It's been a bit of a week here, friends, and I confess I've been in a bit of a funk. I found myself having some real questions about our outreach in this place, if it's the right outreach, and if it matters. We started Freeze Pop Tuesdays this week, and it did not go well. I mean, it started well, but it ended with two early elementary aged kids thinking was fun to run rampant through the building. Resulting in Teresa and I getting to escort said children to their respective homes and have conversations with their respective parents about how children are welcome in our yard, and in fact are encouraged and appreciated. But children running through the building, pulling flowers, and disrespecting Co-op and church members and staff was not behavior that could be tolerated. I know you all think I'm nice and easy-going, maybe even to a fault. I'll tell you, children—and a few Co-op members who happened to be around while I was venting frustration—learned this week that there is a difference between easy-going and a pushover. I'm easy-going, I'm not a pushover. I probably have too much capacity for chaos, but there are boundaries, and when they are crossed, that behavior stops.

I can set boundaries and I can hold boundaries, but it is not a comfortable place for me. Demanding respect and enforcing consequences is something I understand the necessity of and I will absolutely do, but it's not something I enjoy. In fact, it's something I find utterly exhausting. It also raised a lot of questions for me about how I was carrying out outreach in this place. Is it even helpful for me to be inviting children to come to the building, if all they're going to do is commit small acts of vandalism and be rude to Co-op members and

staff offering crucial ministry? Are my attempts at neighborhood outreach endangering our actual mission? These are the questions I found myself asking this week, as I chased the same kid out of the back hallway for the seventy-second time.

Tuesday afternoon, after Freeze Pops, before Wednesday's escort home and parent conversations, I was meeting on Zoom with my lectionary study group. This is a group of pastors that I meet with every other week to talk about the texts for the upcoming Sundays. One of my colleagues shared a couple of verses from the Psalm, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" And then the doorbell rang, for three solid minutes. And when I returned from expressing my sharply worded opinion of THAT particular behavior, my colleague looked at my face over the Zoom call, this mix of exhausted, frustration, and desperation, and remarked, "isn't that how God looks at us sometimes."

"Isn't that how God looks at us sometimes." His words hit straight to my core with the combination of grace and condemnation they contained. Because, and I say this all the time, but this week I lived it, part of being mindful and caring is setting limits. After all, I could have never invited the kids in the first place. Could have sent them home the minute things became rowdy, with express instructions never to return. I could have called the police on a seven-year-old for trespassing. We could kick out Co-op, lock down the building entirely, cement over all Eileen's lovely landscaping so the flowers can never be pulled up, resod the back garden, and only open the building for us on Sundays, and we wouldn't have

any of these problems. The building would be in better shape, my workday would be a lot quieter, and I probably wouldn't have sent an email to the council with half a paragraph missing. We could do that, but that's not what God did for us. God didn't look around at this mess of a world, think, "well, better luck next time," and try again somewhere else. No, God, in the person of Jesus, became one of us and slipped right into the mess of this world, to walk among us, to be one of us, to reveal Godself to us. And that's not all. As we read in our Gospel text this morning, when Jesus' work was done, he left us with the Spirit of truth, to "guide [us] into all the truth." Not, Jesus made clear, the Spirit's truth, but Jesus' own truth. The truth that Jesus got from the Father because Jesus and the Father are one. The place that Jesus held in the faith community, the role of revealer of God, that role was/is now held by the Spirit, who continues to declare to us, to proclaim to us, the revelation of God.

I need to tell you that the story of the building being held in moderate hostage by children has a happy ending. The kids were back on Thursday, and they were very different children from the ones who had been running, screaming through the building the day before. They were polite children, respectful children, children who stayed outside and made it very clear to Teresa and I that their mother had given them very specific instructions as to appropriate behavior on church property—on any property really. And here's something else I need you to know. If you come on Tuesday for Freeze Pops, or any day during the week and you see a group of children, I won't point out to you the ones who were the troublemakers. Please don't ask, and definitely do not try to guess. If you already know which of the kids they were, forget. Because, and here I remind you again, I'm going

to screw this up. I'm not God, and I fall far short of this level of forgiveness all the time, but I am trying my hardest to follow the example of the forgiveness of God. Which, as I tell you every week during the confession and forgiveness, is this, confession was made, forgiveness granted, and the slate is wiped clean. Again, let's be clear, this is not how I always am with forgiveness—my therapist will assure you I can hold a grudge with the best of them. But it is the forgiveness I strive to practice, and the forgiveness I hope others extend to me. Because the truth is, we all make mistakes. We all make bad choices, hurt people's feelings, fail to do the right thing. I do. And when I do, I hope that you, that others, that God, can extend to me the same grace, a grace that isn't keeping an eye out certain I will fail again, but trusts me to grow. This kind of forgiveness is a growing edge for me. And honestly, it's easier to practice it with others than it is to practice it on myself, to believe that God forgives me this fully. I'm learning, along with these kids, along with all of you, how to follow the example of Christ in my own life and how to believe that I too am that fully loved.

Lest you think I am being naïve that one conversation one time with two parents has changed anything, trust me, I'm not. Naïve enough to believe in change, that is. Not this quickly. No miraculous change of nature has occurred this week because Teresa and I talked to a parent through a window. Kids are kids, kids are dumb, it's in their nature. And not just these particular kids, all kids. Our brains don't fully develop until we're twenty-five at best, and we certainly all have interacted with people that we can only hope still have the excuse that their brains are still developing, despite being well past twenty-five. Flowers will be pulled. Tomatoes will be thrown. Running will occur, and someone will definitely

look me straight in the eye and defiantly lie to my face again. And the person doing the lying may not be seven, they may just as easily be seventy. And here all the seventy-year-olds look around uncomfortably, I promise I just picked the age arbitrarily because it had a nice ring with seven. The point is whether we are seven or seventy, we screw this thing called life up all the time. Jesus understands that too.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” Jesus knew that he could not tell his disciples everything they’d need to know, could even less tell them everything we need to know. Imagine Jesus trying to explain social media etiquette to first century Palestinian fishermen. The Bible doesn’t tell us everything there is to know, everything we need to know, it can’t. It would be impossibly long and anyway, that’s not it’s job. That’s what the Spirit is for, to walk alongside us, grow with us, giving us more and more knowledge, revealing more and more of Godself to us as we are able to understand more and more. That things are different now, more multicultural, more diverse, more complicated, is really proof of the moving of the Spirit. Another colleague from that same Tuesday conversation remarked, we don’t look back on our kindergarten selves and think, “how stupid I was back then,” we were five. We don’t hold our five-year-old selves accountable to adult understanding, and we can’t hold our current selves, or others, to standards we have not yet grown into. What we can do, what we must do is give ourselves and those around us, the grace and space to grow. To make mistakes, to not understand, to realize we were wrong and try to be different. As the bible shows us through countless examples, being wrong isn’t the problem, determinedly staying wrong is. There is always

grace available, again and again, to meet us where we are and drag us to where God wants us to be.

That's what we do here at Trinity, what we strive to do at least, what I believe church does when church is at it's best. We recognize that all of us come to this place as works in progress. People who are broken, who are hurting, who hurt others. We give people, ourselves and each other, grace. Space to grow, to make mistakes, to ask for forgiveness and to be forgiven. We create space where we can be transformed by God.

Dear people of God, hear again the words of the Psalm:

³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

⁴what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of [us],
human beings that you should care for [us]?

⁵Yet you have made [us] little less than divine;
with glory and honor you crown [us].

⁶You have made [us] to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under [our] feet:

⁷all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

⁹O LORD our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Thanks be to God. Amen.