

The Second Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 6—Year A  
Exodus 19:2-8a  
Psalm 100  
Romans 5:1-8  
Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

In the midst of a **global pandemic**, in the midst of our **national reckoning with racism**, there are the *circumstances* that are so very **personal** to our lives and the **life of our community**.

**Jean Teague's death and Celebration of Life**, done in **St. Luke's style** with a **COVID-19 twist**. You all never cease to amaze me with all the ways you will **step up** and **do what needs to be done**, taking these **new circumstances** and getting **creative** and **figuring it out**. **Friday** was indeed an *Uncloudy Day* as **Karen Robertson** and **Suzi Mills** sang us to the **Memorial Garden**. We did our **rituals**, we said our **prayers**, and the **birds joined** in our **communal responses**. It was **holy ground** and **beautiful**.

**Thursday** came with the news of **Carolyn Powell's death** after a **long journey to enter the land of light and life and that great communion of saints**. A journey that brought home to us how hard it is in this time of **COVID-19** for our **elders in long-term care** and for **their families and friends** who **can't be present** in all the ways we long to be. And so, we **thank God** for people like **Shelton**, and all those who **work in Hospice** and **serve as nurses and healthcare professionals**; those who so **tenderly midwife our loved ones through their labor to be born anew**. We **thank God** for all those who **understand this work as a holy vocation** and who **hold that holy space in these threshold spaces**.

*And Thursday* also brought the news of **Chuck Blanck's death**, a **larger-than-life icon** of **God's vast unconditional love** for so many in our **St. Luke's community**. A man whose **heart for the most vulnerable** led to the **birth of many of the organizations** that serve our **neighbors in need in the High Country**. A man who **wasn't afraid to rock the boat** when it came to **matters of justice**. A man who **shaped this St. Luke's community in so many ways that reverberate still**. We will have a **zoom wake** a couple of weeks down the road to **share Chuck stories** and to **mark his place in our communal memory**.

As we move through **these days with currents that are so much bigger than any of us** and that are the **defining issues of our generation**, it is **important to remember** that the **rhythm of living and dying and getting born is going on all around us**. The **rhythm of sickness and healing continues to unfold**. The **tough places in our lives**, and the **sweet joys**, so *particular* to each one of us—they *continue* to show up with **great regularity**.

And **on any given day, it can all feel too much, too much to hold in our hearts**. How do we **hold COVID-19** and all that comes with it, and the **anti-racism work that is ours to do**, and these very *particular, tender* places in our very *particular* and *specific* lives?

**We do it be REMEMBERING**. Our passage from **Exodus** today stirs our memory. When we're in the **wilderness**, we **REMEMBER** that **God has borne us up on eagles' wings and brought us to Godself**. And as we **listen to God's voice** and **keep God's covenant**, we **come to know what it means to be God's treasured possession**. *And*, we **REMEMBER, always**, the caveat noted by **Old Testament scholar H. H. Rowley** long ago—**God's people are always chosen for service, never for our glorification or privilege**.

**WE REMEMBER** what **God** told **Moses** to say to **God's** people to remind them that the whole earth is **God's**, but that **God** has called them, *and us*, to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. We, *all of us*, are called to consecrate this world, to anoint it, to help it **REMEMBER** that all of life and all of creation is sacred and holy and to repent of *anything* that desecrates that innate goodness and holiness.

**WE REMEMBER** what **Romans** tells us today. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. And *because* we have this peace and know this love, Paul can say the craziest thing ever—"We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our *sufferings*, knowing that *suffering* produces *endurance*, and *endurance* produces *character*, and *character* produces *hope*, and *hope* does not disappoint us..."

*Seriously? Boast in our sufferings? Who wants sufferings? Who wants the sufferings currently afflicting so many on so many levels? No one. No one wants sufferings, ever.*

But that **doesn't** erase the **truth** of what **Paul** is saying. *Suffering is a given; suffering just comes; it just IS, and to think this mortal life should be otherwise sets us up for perpetual disappointment.*

**BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE** that *suffering* can be **transformative**.

*If we don't deny it, but turn into it, as Jesus did, it can bring about endurance, patience, steadfastness, perseverance, and such perseverance shapes and fashions our character; it deepens and strengthens us, as passing through the refiner's fire always does. And the character that has been deepened and expanded and strengthened is the character that has the capacity for deep hope.*

*Not that sugary, sickening, polyannaish type of hope that has no regard for the suffering all around us, but that hope that is borne out Good Friday and Easter; that hope that is forged out of a steely resurrection. THAT is the only hope that can see us through this time. And THAT is the hope we are promised. BUT we have to REMEMBER, we don't get that hope on the front-end of the suffering. THIS hope only comes to us from staying the course and moving with and through the suffering, moving to and through the cross, entering the tomb with its descent into hell, until the dawn breaks on the third day, and we emerge ready and equipped to walk in the power of the risen life.*

*How do we walk through these days? WE REMEMBER that the authority that Jesus gave to his twelve disciples is the same authority Jesus has given to us—authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness because the thing that drives Jesus is compassion for the crowds who are harassed and helpless; the sheep who long for a shepherd.*

Yes, *we're sheep*, too, but *frankly*, sheep are all Jesus has got to work with. *He believes in us, because he knows the kind of power he's placed within us.* The question is *do we know the kind of power that lives within us? Have we claimed the authority that is ours as those baptized into his body, sealed and marked as his own forever?*

**Jesus is not naïve about what he is asking of us. He's real upfront about sending us out like sheep into the midst of wolves. He's real clear that this work ahead will call us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, peacemakers that are really, really savvy about how the world works.**

**He is crystal clear that following him and proclaiming good news to the sick and those who've lost the capacity to live and the outcasts and taking on demonic, diabolical, divisive forces, following him and proclaiming this kind of good news in these places is going to land us in hot water with the religious structures and powers, AND land us in hot water with the governors and kings—read political powers—AND following him is highly likely to cause deep division with siblings, with parents, with children, with pretty much everybody. Jesus says, "You will be hated by all because of my name." Yippee. Whoo-hoo. Sign me up, right?**

**Anybody experiencing division these days within your family or amongst your friends or co-workers or neighbors as you try to talk about how to approach COVID or what we need to do about racism or how policing needs to stay intact, or be changed, or be abolished altogether? Anybody playing out endless conversations in their head—"Oh, I should have said this when they said that." Jesus says, "Don't waste energy gaming out these conversations—do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Trust that I'll give you the words." And honestly, Jesus is real big on stewarding our energy well. That's that whole bit about "if they don't welcome you, or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet and move on. There are plenty of places that need the good news that "The kingdom of heaven has come near."**

*So many people feel forgotten right now, feel invisible; they need to know that God has not forgotten them, that they are still God's treasured possession worthy of love and care; that God hears the cries of their suffering and knows how harassed and helpless they feel, and that God has sent us as a priestly people, as healers, to bind up wounds and REMIND them how holy and beautiful and worthy and full of dignity they are.*

***It won't be easy. It never is. BUT WE NEVER SIGNED ON TO EASY; WE SIGNED ON TO DYING AND RISING, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.***

*Full of God's love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, with the authority of Jesus and guided by his presence that lives within us always, WE PROCLAIM A HOPE UP TO THE DEMANDS OF THIS MOMENT. You have a peace that can't be taken from you. You are God's treasured possession. You have everything you need for this journey, today, tomorrow, and in all the days to come. THIS is the hope that sustained Jean and Carolyn and Chuck, and this is the hope that will sustain us, too. Amen.*

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks  
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June 14, 2020