



Cultivating 03.14.21
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Good Morning Siblings.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to continue to be in community and partnership in ministry with you all. I am now on my 5th month with you. It is clear to me that the Spirit has been and continues to move in HOLY ways, the kind of movement that disrupts us to make way for transformation. Thanks be to God.

As I approach this time to share a word with you, I think it is very helpful for you to know a bit about where I come from. Yes I moved here from Ohio and was in Utah and Oregon before that but there is so much more than that. I want to share some more about me, with you because this is so essential to how I approach life, faith and scripture.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah to Louis Rafael and Loyda Kyremes, I am a third generation, life-long latinx presbyterian from Utah. I am the daughter of an immigrant from the Dominican Republic through adoption because my grandmother, Ana Martinez chose to sacrifice an unknown future with her son so that my origin story could be manifest. My mother is the 10th of 10 children born to a father with Spanish Basque roots and a Native Indigenous Mother from New Mexico-every one of my aunts and uncles, my tios have been touchstones in my life, their children an anchor to my heritage and a testament to what happens when our ancestors pressed forward knowing, having a vision that they were pressing forward for us.

My sister, Jennifer Alegria is four years older than me. We grew up in the house my parents still live in today. My parents modeled living that included community, family, service and the church. Which also included assimilation, resistance, disappointment and the knots it can leave you in.

I grew up culturally Mormon, the faith of the land and my peers clearing a path for understanding expectations of morality, family and community all while feeling totally out of place as a brown, non-Mormon young woman who felt a call to ministry at the age of 16.

The Presbyterian Church USA was and continues to be a harbor for me in the sea of life. At 16 I was on a national youth leadership committee that physically took me out of Utah, introduced me to the wider church traveling to Montreat and Triennium while meeting young people who LOVED the church and adults who affirmed my gifts and encouraged me to keep stepping forward. How God of God to have Lynn Turnage and her family as a part of our GCPC family and scheduled to help lead worship on this Sunday. Lynn was one of those adults who embraced me in my younger years.

For the first time I was hearing, seeing and building relationships with people of color in the church who were preaching and teaching in ways that disrupted my small imagination of how God could speak and the depths the Spirit would move me, move us.... together.

I was introduced to liberation theology by Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson. Then, he was a solo pastor in Memphis and now as you know he is the first person of color serving the PCUSA as the Stated Clerk of our denomination. He helped usher in the pastoral ministry of our own Marcia Mount Shoop - preaching here at GCPC during her installation service. His love, example and continued commitment to our mutual liberation and the liberation of the PC(USA)

is now part of who I am and how I show up. His wife is a mother to me and I am honored to be a sister to Alycia, their daughter.

Justin, my husband and I met when I was 18 years old. He was the most introverted, soft spoken sophomore in Arend Hall at Whitworth while, I was- well me- not either of those things. We have spent the last 23 years learning what it means to choose love while creating and bringing into the world the most amazing humans we are honored to accompany as parents.

I am that crazy fun aunt to Sofia, Katie, Mayah, Joshua, Elsie, Aria and Oliver. They live in Oregon and Utah which didn't make moving further away easy but I am committed to showing up for them in any way I can.

My world is enriched by the Black and Brown Indigenous siblings of color who abide with me in so many ways. Some of them are joining us for worship today, all of them show up in so many places and in so many ways. I am so thankful for the ways they show up to challenge, support and love me.

Children have always been my jam. From tending children as a teenager to youth and young adult ministry- I LOVE IT! I consider my call and vocation THE BEST job. I have been called to spiritual gardening. My work is cultivating, planting and watering.... Sometimes I get to see it grow into something huge while many times, I am called to prayer because I have to trust in what I have done remembering that the Spirit will do what the Spirit does...

Then there are other times when I get a call, a text or an email that renews and refreshes my soul.... reminding me that the things I do matter and that God is so present....here is the gift of the week. Our Ali Reed worshipping while building her rock towers to mark her Holy Space...

Jesus Loves Me Video

I recall all of this for you because- it is so much of what has formed me- what continues to form me. I bring all of this and more to this moment and into my daily living. So, you may have not known all of this...but NOW YOU KNOW. This is when the more you know should flash across the screen.

Video - The More You Know (0:06)

I joke but, all of us, should be able to share this kind of introduction with one another. It can help us in our listening (ears), in our seeing (eyes) and our compassion (heart) for and with one another.

BREATHE

Now, to this wonderful whopper of scripture we find from our Lectionary on this Sunday of springing forward. It is arguably one of the most well-known passages of scripture while simultaneously one of the most misused.

Backing up to last week when we reflected on what Marcia coined as Jesus' temple tantrum. When Jesus was not only angry about the actions of the people in the temple but more importantly the system that created the situation in the first place. The questions of last week are still metabolizing in me.... why are we not angrier? Why do I still choose to let little things

get to me while I continue to push down the destructive trauma and anger, I have from the oppression of my ancestors, my siblings-myself? To me and to those all created in the image of God...We need to let the tables be turned over and deal with the havoc we have been tangled up in.

BREATHE

When I was young, I remember my parents listening to Paul Harvey on the radio. After his recollection of telling the listener about a little-known fact or person with a key element to a story, he would get to the very end saying "And now, you know the rest of the story".

We are moving toward the rest of the story- God's continual movement to try to get us unstuck. For us to metabolize all that we have taken in and move toward a better way. Jesus is part of this journey.

We need to cultivate better ways of living that mirror the beliefs and faith that we proclaim, yet 23 continually stay silent and unmoved- unmoved in so many ways.

Jesus had not yet left the area after the tantrum in the temple. The disruption of his truth telling tantrum was still very fresh in the air. It is night and Nicodemus has questions- and yet the disruption and potential association with Jesus in this community prompted Nicodemus to go to Jesus in the late hours of the evening. One Bible scholar refers to this encounter with Jesus as Nic at Night- Nicodemus, the Pharisee, the ruler touting render unto Caesar..., the human whose faith is mingled with his fear- Nicodemus is us AND where does he go with his fear? To Jesus- to get clarity.

Jesus, as written in the gospel of John, John who tends to write in images and poetry in ways we do not hear in the other gospels.

Jesus goes on to tell Nicodemus that he must be born from above- once again scripture has us and Nicodemus saying "what the?"

Jesus, I imagine still reeling from the events at the temple, takes a deep breath and tries again.

BREATHE

He explains that he came from heaven and was born so that the world might be saved from condemnation-even though many still were living in darkness- in hiding. Did you catch that... those who were still living in darkness, in hiding.

This imagery is not by accident, nor is it about lightness being best and darkness being the worst. The translation of light in this passage refers to literal light and not pigment of our skin. The distortion of light and dark in scripture is once again a distortion created by us, a white supremacy distortion an anti-blackness reinforcement that has no place in this scripture or anywhere in our theology.

The darkness has to do with those who hide from the light... those who choose to deal with life in the darkness, in secret and not out where everyone can see.

The condemnation in this scripture is the inner turmoil that is a result of secret keeping and death-dealing in hiding, pretending that you can continue to live a shadowed life while proclaiming all sorts of lies in the light.

This scripture can get the most of us, whirling us into a tizzy about belief in Jesus as the ONLY way to everlasting life. As if Christians have the market on good living and morality- Many principles of Christ's teachings are mirrored in faith traditions the world round.... Let's not get wrapped up in Christianity being the ONLY way- God's love is bigger than that and we have some work to do- CLEARLY our actions could help reframe and re-define what Christianity is and how it moves-literally moves-not talks in our world.

BREATHE

The last year we have seen structures fall- physically. Demands for the idols of white supremacy to be addressed and dismantled- some by force and some by choice. And then there are those that sit while we stew about all they represent. There are barriers continuing to protect these monuments until plans and decisions can be enacted to dismantle them.... Yes, it is frustrating- BUT their lingering presence should not be why we are angry and what we should be addressing. You see, they are still there because the liberation from racism and white supremacy is still here.

Every time a monument fell or was removed in the past year there was a jolt of energy that would move in my head, my heart, my body. It was something forward moving....and this is what happens with abuse. When you are in relationship with people, communities and an empire that is filled with abuse- if you experience even a small moment of change or liberation-it easily gets conflated. The excitement around the momentary change of posture takes down some defenses and you start thinking things might be changing.

It can be so easy to take a moment and believe it is signaling a revolution though nothing in your experience has given you logical reason to believe the relationship is changing.

Siblings.... movement is happening but the relationships- they have not fully changed. Let's stop focusing on why the monuments are still up when we know that the history and values represented in these monuments still have a death-dealing grip on us all. What do we need to do to cultivate the land around us to be transformed for new growth, for new roots to establish once the land is cleared? The removal of anything does not transform- it clears space for new possibilities.

Cultivation takes time. We need to figure out what is under the surface, just like the chickens and start sorting through what is right underneath us.

Video - Chickens (around 10sec)

Getting back to these words of living in the light vs living in darkness.
We just sprang forward. We have lost an hour while gaining more daylight...I see you God...

Our dear Margaret Rada has been struggling with some side effects of treatment that are affecting her eye. She was directed to wear an eyepatch which had me reeling into pirate fodder.... giggling as I addressed her as Maaaaarge-ret.

She encountered a pharmacist this week that shared with her why pirates wore eye patches. It was not because all of them had one eye. It was because it was the fastest way for them to adjust to the light above and below deck. They would literally sacrifice half of their vision so that when they moved from space to space, they would switch the eye patch so that the vision from the other eye would be optimal for the light or the darkness. Interesting what humans can do to avoid the adjustments.

There is so much to this imagery that is being used. What happens when we are in the dark? Our eyes have to adjust, our perception of space changes, our ability to navigate can be hindered and our ability to see very far is limited.

When we move from darkness to light what happens? Again, we have to adjust our eyes, the space changes, our ability to navigate and our sight expands.

Jesus is talking about this. What is it that we need to do to embrace and live lives that start cultivating space where the hiding stops, where we start navigating the light together so that we stop returning to the darkness or worse trying to trick ourselves and our bodies that we can handle life lived quick and loosely in both the light and the dark?

This week in Bible study we were talking about how the identification of ourselves as Christians has gotten complicated.

Christianity has been co-opted as a belief system that continually serves the empire while pushing people further and further into the borderlands of our communities while perpetuating a picture of preferred whiteness and rightness at the center. And even with all of that one of our dear GCPC siblings said "I am just crazy for Jesus" ...her face lighting up and her words expressing both the freedom and expansiveness that has meant for her. She has navigated a way to live life in the name of Jesus.

What are you living your life in the name of?

For me I am living in the name of Juan Nepomoceno Archuleta, who found himself in the Menaul Boarding school founded by Presbyterians. He worked hard, cherished his education and went on to raise a family of 10 children while dedicating himself to following Christ through the Presbyterian Church who he tethered himself and his family to. Living in his name is living in the way of Jesus that is about determination, sacrifice and continually showing up, even when things get messy.... a family of 10 children can get messy.

I am living in the name of Snake, the first houseless person I called friend at the age of 7. He came to the meals organized by my father and the church. I would sit with him and talk about anything and everything. He would bring me things made out of the treasures he found along the way. I called him my friend and he did the same of me. Living in his name is living in the way of Jesus that is about the Imago Dei that we shared. The holy space that happens when people are looked in the eye as beautiful creations, beyond circumstance or status. The community shared when we gather around table and create holy ground.

I am living in the name of my 3rd grade teacher Mrs. Draper, who saw me. I was not just another student. She encouraged me and somehow knew that I needed whatever extra she could give. She was not Mormon and I believe she knew that I could feel lonely. She smiled with delight when I showed up in my white classroom with my Michael Jackson t-shirt and was quick to praise me when I improved and achieved a personal best. Living in her name is living

in the way of Jesus that is about honoring all people, recognizing and celebrating their uniqueness and making sure no one is overlooked.

The list goes on and on. How we live, who and what is dictating our life matters. Believing, saying and doing are not all the same. What we are doing matters. Where we are showing up matters.

What now? What do you need to cultivate and sort out now for the next shift?

It has been a full year of sheltering in place and quarantine.

Just now, we are seeing how justice might be served in the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Some of us are now immunized while some of us still wait our turn. People are more than ready for the world to “open up again” though we don’t agree on what this means and how this will determine our collective future. We are not ready -we think we are because of how we used to live.... we are on the precipice of more change and possibly more complacency.

How are you ready to address this? What things have been stirring just below the surface in you? It’s time we talked about it all.

GCPC. I said yes to a call to be here with you in part because of the culture you have cultivated around dismantling white supremacy. In many ways this congregation is revolutionary when it comes to the prophetic and faith-filled ways you have come together to start untangling the hold racism has on us all.

I celebrate this while I recognize that this also means our journey needs to move - digging in even deeper.

BREATHE

This is not the time to rest, to feel superior because we are not like “those Christians” or we have done “this book study” or our pastor “preaches against white supremacy”.

Jesus is asking us to stop hiding. To look at the things that need to die in us. The ways we need to be born again.... Not so that we can be in heaven but so that love doesn’t have to be killed in order for us to keep living.

BREATHE- Repeat

Jesus is the Word made flesh. We never deserved the gift of love, grace and liberation from our death-dealing he represented and yet it is and was ours for the taking.

We are essential to the rest of the story....

Let us start to live like love was killed for us, sacrificed so that we could get over ourselves and get on with the liberation of us all- Living like living in the name of Jesus is worth our attention, practice and our very lives.

I am here for it and pray that we all might claim the love that will not let us go!

Amen.