



“LOOKING FOR LOVE”

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 13:31-35

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, March 16, 2025 Lent #2

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

Luke 13:31-35

13:31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 13:32 He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 13:33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 13:34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 13:35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

This sermon is about the struggle to find true love
Not the love you're thinking about—the kind of love
That sweeps you off your feet and makes all the
Pain go away, even if just temporarily.

This sermon is about the struggle to find true love
For the exiles
Not the kind of exiles you are thinking about
The ones who are strangers to us, faces in social media posts
Or stories in the news

This sermon is about the struggle to find true love
For the parts of you that you have banished
Probably very young ones, probably locked away
For a long, long time
You learned early that this part of you was not safe in the world
That this part of you is clothed in the sack cloth of shame
In the shackles of blame

This part of you is guarded by many protectors
And managers and emergency workers
Who make sure this one stays far from
Your consciousness
These protectors, these managers, these emergency workers
Are driven and determined to keep this exile
Hidden and quiet-and hopefully rendered
Forgotten, unknown finally

This is a sermon about how that internal captivity
Is a survival skill and a way to keep living
But only half way.
This is a sermon about the places that have not known love
Or the places we are certain could never possibly know love
So, we, ourselves, withhold love because
Extending love into that cavernous place
Opens up a box that puts pandora to shame

This is a sermon about the sorrow of a neglected
Inner child, a rejected little one, an abandoned
Emotional landscape, an attempted erasure of
Your full humanity, and mine, and ours.

Because all the exiles within each of us
Add up to whole families, whole societies, whole cultures
Estranged from themselves, at odds with themselves,
Living at cross purposes, self-destructing,
Shaming and shunning the vulnerability that
Can make us whole.

This is a sermon about the ways we are the Jerusalem
That elicited Jesus' sorrow and grief-
The internal map of a holy land living
As a war zone, where the true prophets
Rarely have a fighting chance.

Our exiles are our prophets
They are creative, they are honest,
They are innocent, they are true
They are the ones who needed love

From the family of things
But instead got exasperation and chastisement
Instead got hostility and blame and rejection
Instead got violence and cruelty
They've got the scar tissue to show for it

Jesus' sorrow is for all of us
And he bears it all for us
The pain of being rejected and thrown
away by the human family that
is supposed to welcome us and make room
For us
And rejoice that we are here to make the
World better, more complete.

Jesus wants to love all of us, every part
But we bristle at that kind of exposure
Get out of here, Jesus, or Herod is going to kill you

"You tell that fox," Jesus says, "That I'm gonna keep on
Doing the work of loving every last part of the people"
"You tell that fox," Jesus says, "That I'm gonna keep on
Calling the demons by name—because I can really see
the pain."

"You tell that fox," Jesus says, "That he can't stop me
From sharing the medicine God gave me to share."

Jesus sees your exiles and they don't scare him
He does not want them to stay quiet. Jesus sees your exiles
and invites them into his embrace
So he can tincture the pain with a sweet
warm tea and a soft place to rest
And a shoulder to weep on, weeping
Stitched together with stories, memories
the true history, the true herstory, the actual story
Of the time when the exile was
Just getting their bearings in the world
Just stretching their wings
The joy they felt at discovery, the trust
They had for the world.

The ways they saw colors and creatures,
The music they knew by heart—the drum beat
They were eager to share with anyone who would listen.

This is a sermon that simply acknowledges
The prophet, the artist, the playful creative,
The medicine one, the lover of song, the curious
Adventurer, the wise one who wondered, the playful
Passionate one who shouted and cried with abandon
At injustice, the one who drank in love like a delicious warm
Soup that had the roundest, deepest flavor of home.

This is a sermon that makes space for the grief
Of the lost years, the fallow field that could have
Grown wild flowers, the regret that never got to
find its answer, its resolution, it's full circle.

This is a sermon that can't find the full sentences
To tell you the story of the lost ones,
Because I am still coaxing my exile to tell me more.
She starts to come out, tentatively, hesitantly,
And then another storm hits, and the protectors
Whisk her away, to a place so deep that I can
Forget she's there. I can be so hell bent on
Not remembering her that I relearn the shame
And blame again about the fact that I actually need people, too.
It hurts too much to
Realize how much vitality I passed on
For the sake of survival.

This is a sermon about the golden thread
That keeps me forever connected to her
And you to your sweet exile
It's not too late to make space for them to
Stick around for a while.
To go to the grocery store and stock
Up on some ingredients for the food
Our souls really need.
No part of you is defective.
No part of you is worthless.

The convulsions of our nation right now
Show us the danger of continuing to push our
Exiles away. That strategy always leads to violence.
Disappearing someone takes a lot of fire power
And cruelty and lots of distractions and anesthesia,
Lots of lies and deprivation to make us numb and afraid.
We see the consequences of sleeping on
The parts of us who were told to sit down
And shut up and go away and
Stop asking us to feel the pain.

Acknowledging the loss that comes from life
Being trivialized for survival might be the
Step we can take today. The exiles can stay safely tucked
Away if we need them to be right now.
But If we can make space for what
Was not that we needed to be, maybe we can
Catch a glimpse of what can be that we've never known before.

Looking for love without fully knowing the
Love will take us on some dangerous paths
Looking for love by loving the exiles starts with
Letting them be worth our sorrow,
And letting ourselves be worth the liberation
That we say is for all.
That all has to really be all—and
That starts with all of you, and all of me
All of the ones lost in the winds
Of history repeating itself
Instead of history feeding us the truth
That can set us free.

This is the best I have to offer today.
Because I am working alongside you
In this tangle of pain and loss
I am struggling with you
In this cycle of denial and dangerous lies
I am striving with you to hold on
to the promise of a better world despite

This violent regression we are in
I was up at night listening to the winds
Howl and hearing the rain fall sideways
And remembering rising in the morning
To see the destruction we would change us forever.
I pray you hear in this grief poetry
The love I have for you, and for us
The earnest hope that I hold onto
That our liberation is the umbilical cord
Of our shared humanity
And that something new is being born
Sorrow is not our enemy, she does not
Slow us down. She gives us truth,
She fuels the fire of the energy we need
To continue building our shared future
Not by leaving the exiles behind,
But by finally making space for them
To show us the way.

Thanks be to God.