

Unleashing Hope and Joy

Psalm 8; Romans 5: 1-5

And Paul proclaims that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” This season of Pentecost we revel in that gift. The gift that has been given to us; that helps us know of God’s love and hope and peace. God’s hope too has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit has been given to us to such an extent that even challenges, suffering and tensions; the tensions between personal preference and deeply held conviction, the tensions between our brokenness and our blessings. All of these can be illuminated in that love, hope and peace God has given us.

The words you have heard used today in Celebrate God’s Presence - Traditional and Edgy; Quest and Valued; Blessed and Broken - were just some of the words arising as the DEAP pod prayerfully reflected on the year that has been, on the community that we are and the community that we serve. DEAP is like all our pods; a circle that listens. Their role is to listen during fellowship, Sunday morning worship, chats in the hall. They listen in our small groups and in our committee meetings. They listen at the food bank depot and at community dinner. Here are some of the things they have been hearing.

Why is it that people come to church?

We have discovered that people come for many reasons. Some come specifically to learn how to share their time and their talents with the wider community. They know they are blessed, and they want to share. Others are more aware that they come most often when they feel broken; broken by grief, by hard decisions that need to be made, by health crisis of all sorts and by isolation. We strive to be a place where people can bring all brokenness and find that here no matter how broken you feel you are whole in God’s eyes and valued as you are. We come then to be transformed, to remember that our tears are holy water; to remember that our pain can help us have empathy as we listen to Jesus’ life and death story; that our suffering and our challenges can become gifts if we allow them to be transformed into compassion for others. We truly try and be a place where even conflict becomes holy, where honesty and courage are broken open and allowed to be a blessing.

Many come to seek meaning, to seek out relationship, to help untangle their lives. Our passage this morning can be challenging because it seems to say that God gives us suffering so that we can develop endurance and character and hope. My personal belief is that God, upon giving us human bodies and free will, thought, “oh good gravy, that’s going to cause some suffering right there,” and knowing that there would be suffering God created endurance and resilience, something we can seek to learn together. God created the maturing mind and heart that allows us to grow and deepen and strengthen our faith. And it is in community where we are accepted as those broken people, not so they can be fixed but rather so that all of us upon showing one another our brokenness can be valued and reminded of God’s love; can be asked and encouraged to make authentic expressions, whether through art and music, through words or prayer, whether it be because you meet a stranger or because you get to sit by an old friend.

The other form of suffering we know is that we live in a culture that wants to hinder questions; wants us to just nod at whatever the headline says. We are followers of Jesus. Questions, questing along those edges is what Jesus did. Without rejecting his tradition, he rooted down into it and then said, you think Sabbath was created for us to do nothing in the face of illness, depression and oppression. No, Sabbath was created so that we could heal one another actively in a world that hinders questing and adventures we strive to be a community where we are all allowed to be questors, adventurers in faith.

As Carol-Anne reminded you all year long we have been trying to both learn new behaviors and renew old traditions. This is a year where we saw and heard from those who are challenging us to trip over our tongues to get names and pronouns correct. And it also is the year where we spent all Lent diving into the ancient rituals and rites of our faith. We practiced and practiced coming to this table; coming to it with whoever was sitting with us, no matter if they believed ‘properly’ or not, whether they could describe the Trinity in proper theological language or not, we practiced coming to the table again and again to remind ourselves that we are beloved children of God.

The other question DEAP asked was: How do we leave this place?

Here are some of the answers they heard: When I leave church, I am lighter. When I leave church, I feel more mature, like I can have a wider view. I leave church knowing I am wanted and accepted. I leave church confused; I have learned way too many things this week.

This past year, like so many years before in this sacred place, we have been challenged. We have gone to the edges to see who is there awaiting us and we have sunk into our traditions, been nourished by Scripture, by Sacraments and by moments of holy honesty awakening us to one another. Let us pray: God your love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Your love is in us to such an extent that even the suffering and tensions of

life are holy, are meaningful. Help us to experience your hope, peace and love so much that we express it in our whole lives. Through Christ we pray, Amen.