

Making the Most of It

Jeremiah 1: 4-10; Luke 13: 10-17

Opening our hearts to the unexpected: Jeremiah to the unexpected call, a woman to the unexpected ability to look people in the eye after 18 years of being bent over. The unexpected, when you are sure you know what things are like, where order is, and what day of the week you should be doing what...and then the shock of hearing Jesus say, “the day of the week does not matter, the need of the person right beside you does.”

I start this morning with the story of the most unexpected thing that happened to me this summer. I had been looking forward to it all summer: I was going to my sister’s summer yoga class. My sister lives in Sicamous in the summertime. Once a week they have yoga. I love it; it is called ‘Yoga and a Latte’. You get a latte in reward for doing yoga. (I would go to more gyms if there was food as a reward. It just makes perfect sense to me.) My sister’s favorite position in yoga is when you take either a ball or roll up your mat, place it on your spine and then lie back and what happens is it really opens your chest.

And if you think that yoga is hard remember that yoga means ‘deep breathing’, so even if you can’t get into the position in a way that looks suave, if you are deep breathing you are doing it properly. So, I took a deep breath; the sky above was blue, the grass below was green and then the loudest train God ever made went rumbling through Sicamous! I wanted to stand up and say there are six weeks that I have a holiday. How dare you run trains through my yoga class. Luckily the yoga teacher was a yoga teacher from Sicamous, and she said, ‘Now every time you hear that train bellow, deepen your breath.’ I am not someone who deeply breathes when someone is interrupting me with loud noises. And so, my yoga practice was unexpectedly broken and then healed by my realizing that deep breathing through a train running by (a block away) makes it okay that a train was running by during yoga class.

Jesus shocked people all the time. Sometimes it was by calling them by their first name or including them in a meal invitation. As all of us have experienced, there are times when we feel invisible and so to be seen is so powerful. Jesus also shocked the people around him, by doing just this, talking to the invisible ones. Saying, ‘This one matters; matters more than what you expect; matters

more than what you think is right.’ Jesus took people and made the most of them. Seeing them, healing them, at times letting them know it was *their* faith that made them well.

For those of us that have been coming to church this summer, we have gotten used to ...well church in summer. Summertime in the church means arriving ‘not early,’ and sometimes a little late. It means picking up a coffee before or after at the farmer’s market. For some of you it might even mean, like I did last week, sleeping in on the occasional Sunday. And as September starts, we will continue. We will continue to come to church, occasionally sleeping in, but I want you to begin to think too of the people who just now are either sitting alone or perhaps with a family member or friend, saying, ‘do you think we should do that church thing this year?’

Now, some of them are parents of 4 ½ year-olds. You see, 3 and 4 is the age when often parents don’t want their children, well, seen in public. They are moody little things (the children, not the parents) and so often they disappear for those years from Kids’ Church and church. And so, they are sitting around the breakfast table this morning thinking, ‘Do you think we are ready? Do you think that on Sundays we could have everyone dressed by 10:20 am?’ Other folk, young adults, older seniors are wondering if this year is the year to start a new habit: to connect with a community where faith matters; to go back to church; to find a church where it is safe to be themselves, to hold hands with their lover, and sing to God.

For those of us for whom these pews are pretty much comfortable, it can be startling to remember how unexpected church love is. It is unexpected in this world to come to a place where you might be sitting beside someone who is older than your grandma or younger than you think you have ever been. You might be by someone who has been at this church forever or is like you, brand spanking new. So, I want you to ponder how you will respond to the person who might come in the next few weeks and be that unexpected reminder for you that **this place is not ours. It is God’s house of prayer for all.**

Two examples, the first is something we talk about a lot here. I need you to practice what you will say if someone is sitting in “your” favorite spot in a pew. We can review the things that aren’t helpful. (‘That’s **my** spot,’ being the most obvious one.)

Now, take a look around you and remember that these pews are quite long. I want you to look around and remember that (to my knowledge) nobody in this room bites. So, if you must sit beside Brenda instead of beside Nancy it will be okay! (Brenda might ask you to greet some Sunday, and you just say ‘no thank you’ or ‘I’ve already signed up.’) Remember: It is easier for *you* to go and sit by someone you know than for a newcomer to go and sit beside someone they don’t. **Do what is a little uncomfortable to allow them to be more comfortable.**

The other person I think of when I hear this story about indignant people, and please know as I tell this story, I am often the indignant one, is of a funeral with unexpected noises. I was leading a funeral for an amazing woman who for her entire career had been what is called a “teacher’s assistant,” which for anyone who has been a teacher, teacher’s assistant or student, you know that

means the crucial person in the room that is keeping the teacher sane and keeping the children mostly on task. It is a very hard calling. This woman had been amazing at it.

When I prepared myself to walk up the aisle, I saw a family I knew. I had met them in an odd situation where they had all been at the bar one night, I had gone in, and the one person, the older son of the family had sworn in my direction. Now, I knew I was in a bar, but that was still unexpected. Then he called me over. 'I have Tourette's,' he said. 'I will say something worse tomorrow.'

So, when I walked into this funeral and I saw him I thought, 'I want to make sure he knows that I know who he is and how he expresses himself.' So, I asked him how he knew this woman. "Oh, she is the **only** reason I got through grade one and two and three and four and five and six. I was sure I couldn't do school and she was sure I could. I am going to make a lot of noise today." Whenever he felt emotion, his sounds would increase. (They were varied. There was one he called 'the seal'; there were inappropriate words and sometimes the sound that sounds like someone is trying to irritate you.) But because he was in his community, people knew when they heard it no matter what the sound is, he was mourning a woman who was crucial in his life. It didn't mean that his noises didn't sometimes startle us, but it helped us remember that they were appropriate; even the swear words were appropriate, because from him they meant 'I shall miss this woman.'

And so, in the Sundays to come, there will be folk here who will unexpectedly surprise you. There will be some here who will be shocked at you and your behaviour because you will tell them that they belong here. They will not have been heard that ever before in a Christian space. And so, we gather to nourish ourselves next week let us remind ourselves that whoever walks in, however bent over they are, they are already a member of our family. May our hearts and our pews be open. Amen.