

Please echo this prayer -

O God who makes the heart and ear,  
We listen care'fly as you draw near,  
To hear your word in many ways,  
And live your life through all of our days. Amen.

Hear a word from God from Acts 1:6-14

This is a word from God to the people of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

I.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem from Bethany, a village on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the place from which the Messiah would come (Zech 14:4). The Messiah would come and conquer and remain and rule. For the disciples, coming down from

Bethany into Jerusalem must have felt right: the long wait would be over, the prophecy would be fulfilled! But now Jesus leads them in the opposite direction. Instead of entering Jerusalem, they're leaving it. Instead of descending from the Mount of Olives, they're climbing it.

They're retracing their steps. Instead of the Messiah arriving, the Messiah is — could this be right? — leaving. The choreography is striking, and on its face, disturbing. The long-expected pattern of salvation is turned on its head!

What might this mean for us at Triune Mercy Center today?

Most of us know something about LEAVING (or being left), about life getting TURNED ON ITS HEAD.

We often ask, “Why?” as the disciples must be asking, “Why?” in our story from Acts today.

And that’s okay.

I want to stand beside you for a moment and be with you in your questioning, to be with you in your loneliness, to be with you in your upside down life, to be with you.

And I want to preach good news to you, something that I believe deep down in my heart.

That good news is this.

God is a God of surprises.

God is a God who reveals Godself in surprising people, in surprising places, and in surprising things.

God is a God of an upside down kingdom, where the first are last and the last are first, where the strong are weak and the weak are strong, and where the foolishness of God is wiser than people’s wisdom.

In this upside down kingdom, God reveals Godself in ways that happiness reveals itself in this poem by writer Jane Kenyon titled “Happiness.”

There’s just no accounting for happiness,

or the way it turns up like a prodigal  
who comes back to the dust at your feet  
having squandered a fortune far away.

And how can you not forgive?

You make a feast in honor of what was lost, and take from its place the  
finest  
garment, which you saved for an occasion  
you could not imagine, and you weep night and day  
to know that you were not abandoned,  
that happiness saved its most extreme form  
for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never  
knew about, who flies a single-engine plane  
onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes  
into town, and inquires at every door  
until he finds you asleep midafternoon,  
as you so often are during the unmerciful  
hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.

It comes to the woman sweeping the street  
with a birch broom, to the child  
whose mother has passed out from drink.

It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing

a sock, to the pusher, to the basket maker,  
and to the clerk stocking cans of carrots  
in the night.

It even comes to the boulder  
in the perpetual shade of pine barrens,  
to rain falling on the open sea,  
to the wineglass weary of holding wine.

Our surprising God is ready to reveal Godself to you in the upside down  
kingdom.

It's beautiful.

II.

This reversal makes Jesus' message clearer. Jesus is passing the mantle. It's as if he says, "You have heard it said, 'Wait for a Messiah who will deliver you from trouble.' But I say to you, Take up my mantle, for you, too, have a role to play in God's story of redemption. You and me! You will now take the baton, you will now turn and descend from the Mount of Olives and enter the holy city, "beginning from Jerusalem." You are "witnesses of these things," you shall proclaim the good news with your

words and with your lives, you, all of you, I hereby commission you and bless you and send you into the world for the love of the world!

What might this mean for us at Triune Mercy Center today?

We have to proclaim life in the midst of situations of long-standing and increasing injustice, of different types of violence trampling upon basic human rights. This proclamation has to be done with “humility,” without

fear of the powerful of the world...(Gustavo Gutierrez)

With humility and courage, we must stand up and speak out with our neighbors whose voices are being silenced, whose very lives are being erased.

With humility and courage, we must sit down beside those who are being harmed by a Christian religion wrapped up in an American flag, by Christian nationalism.

With humility and courage, we must meet with those who are in search of their basic needs - food, clothing, housing, livable wages, healthcare, and education - and demand with them these human rights.

With humility and courage, we must march with our neighbors in protest against those who sow cruelty, chaos, and fear.

With humility and courage.

All out of love.

You and me!

III.

And we do not go alone. In this passage from Acts, even as Jesus ascends into the cloud, he promises Pentecost: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” an event Jesus promises will happen “not many days from now,” after which “you will be

my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8,5). Into the world, for the love of the world! The same idea underpins the question the angelic figures ask the disciples as Jesus withdraws: “Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” (Acts 1:11). It’s as if they’re saying, Let’s go! Jesus

will return in due course, but that’s not your concern. Your mission is to receive the Spirit and go into the world proclaiming the good news that the upside down kingdom of God is at hand.

What might this mean for us at Triune Mercy Center today?

Barbara Brown Taylor, writes that Ascension Day, one of the most forgotten feast days of the church year, is the day that eleven people, with nothing but a promise and a prayer, consented to become the church.

For while they still stood with their necks cranked up, gobsmacked, wondering what the heck was going on, they were given the message: stop looking up, better to look around instead, at each other, at the world, at the ordinary people in their lives, because that was where they were most likely to find Christ, not the way they used to know him, but the new way, not in his own body, but in their bodies, the risen, the ascended Lord who was no longer anywhere on earth so that he could be everywhere instead.

I wrote this poor, little Franciscan story to show Christ in our world today.

See if you can find him.

Juniper sat with his face to the morning sun.

“Spending time with brother sun again I see,” said Tina as she sat down beside him.

“Dang, I’m like a bowl of Rice Crispies,” she laughed as her bones snapped, crackled and popped.

“It’s music to my ears,” said Juniper, “Cause it means you’re here.”

They sat in silence for a while.

Tina turned and placed her gnarled, calloused hand gently on his head.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” she prayed.

“Go now with a heart that isn’t hard like Stone Avenue right here in front of us but with a heart of flesh like that little Carolina wren that’s singing on the power line above us. May God give you eyes that look closely and see, and ears that listen carefully and hear. Go out and be a friend to the world,” she said in her blessing.

Her left knee buckled a little bit as she rose from the brick wall, but she steadied herself on the handle of the grocery cart filled with everything she owned in the world.

The wobbly wheels squeaked and squawked as she went on to the corner and turned out of sight and out of sound.

And in the place on the sidewalk where Tina’s torn and tattered shoes had been, a dandelion, gritty and golden, grew out of a crack in the sidewalk.

And Juniper knew God’s smile.

Our musicians are going to play and sing a new song by Amy Grant.

The title of the song is “Beautiful Lone Companion.”

To me, it paints a beautiful picture of Jesus.

My theology professor in seminary, Dr. Molly Marshall, taught me that the way we image God is important.

We can present an image of God that is helpful and healing to the world.

We can present an image of God that is hopeless and hurting to the world.

I think Amy in her song presents the helpful, healing kind of image.

It’s a song that reminds us that Jesus is here at the margins of the world, looking to show love and care to all of us, especially to those of us who are hopeless and hurting.

That Jesus is here at the margins of the world, looking and acting much differently from the way we think he should look and act.

I’d like for you to look closely and listen carefully to the person beside you, the person in front of you, the person behind you, the people all around you.

God is there, and there, and there, and everywhere.

And for that I am thankful.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

IV.

Friends, our worship service in this sanctuary ends. Now, the wider worship service begins. Why do we stand looking up toward heaven? Go in peace - into the world for the love of the world! Amen.